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THE HEIRLOOM

OR

THE DESCENT OF VERNWOOD MANOR

BY

T. DUTHIE-LISLE

VOL. II.

LONDON
GAY AND BIRD
27, KING WILLIAM STREET, WEST STRAND
1893

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CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

As poor Jules Massey, in the very safe keeping of those two officers of the law, drove through the bright summer morning sunshine freshened by the morning breeze, and as he was able to collect his scattered thoughts, it was with emotions differing widely from his ordinary self-importance, that usually before he had often taken that same drive.

Somebody has said — and said perhaps shrewdly,—however few there may be who will endorse the opinion expressed,—that it is better to be a millionaire's friend than to be the millionaire. However far this may be an error of judgment, or however true or untrue it may be, it is certain that the personage in office,

who has the paying away of a millionaire's small cash—and especially in such amounts as the late master of Vernwood squandered,—and the management of the millionaire's minor affairs, whether that personage be black skinned or whether his skin be white, and probably even if his skin were blue, is the object of the respectful attention, nay, almost the adoration, of a very large and admiring circle of his immediately surrounding world; his friends are not few.

Besides, Jules Massey, especially as Bertram Gonault had grown in wealth and importance, had become the mouthpiece, the *avant courier* and the great man of his master, a great man almost greater in some senses than the great man himself.

Many times before had Jules Massey traversed that road, but it was in all the dignity and importance of his high estate.

And verily it must be confessed that the cloak of Jules' dignity became him well. He had been

no low toned grovelling cringing underling, Jules Massey esquire was the gentleman's gentleman in the highest and most important, as well as in the blackest degree, who enveloped himself, in proportion to the ebon blackness of his skin, with those petty and pretty high and mighty manners which we call "airs."

As long as such an individual can maintain his footing on the summit of that slippery eminence, the topmost pinnacle of the temple of fame, the cynosure of those who gaze up at the dizzy height with admiring eyes, he is a very great personage indeed, but let him once slip, those very admirers remark, "I told you so," and then lo very great indeed is his fall.

Formerly, as with his master's well appointed equipage, he had rolled along that road which now he traversed in such different state. As he cast his eyes around him, it seemed to him almost as if he had regarded all the surround-

ing property, all those bright green woods, all those smiling pastures, all those cosy well kept homesteads, almost as if in a certain sense his own.

But now in one half-hour, in one magically marvellous turn in the kaleidoscope of events, how sadly and woefully had all this been changed.

Jules wondered now what earthly demoniacal sprite could, for that one short half-hour, have tempted him from his sick master's bedside.

On arriving at their destination, which was the local police station, the three men, Jules and his two custodians, alighted, Mr. Superintendent Whittier, from the rough treatment which he had received at the paws and jaws of Monk, mauled, begrimed, and crestfallen, clad in little but tatters and rags, became the central object of curious regard.

Here, at the police station, instead of the luxurious appointments of Vernwood, Jules

after undergoing certain preliminary formalities peculiar to the situation, was shown quite civilly into an apartment of the massive cold stone building called a cell, of the regulation dimensions, containing just so many superficial feet of God's earthly space, and just so many cubic feet of God's free air as is apportioned by her Majesty's Prison Commissioners to each of their unwilling and unwelcome guests.

* * * *

Within two hours of Jules Massey's arrest, Mr. Lumley arrived at Vernwood, that astute lawyer, instead of coming to Vernwood Village Station as instructed, having just posted twenty miles across a hilly country, in order in his own wisdom, as he believed, to shorten his journey, had travelled from London by a newly conceived route of his own devising, and losing thereby about fifteen hours in point of time.

Had Mr. Lumley followed the instructions of those who knew, he should have arrived at

Vernwood the night before. Had he done so the Vernwood tragedy might never have been perpetrated, and this story might never have been told.

Such is an illustration of the way in which trivial obstacles or trivial blunders may alter the course of great events.

Mr. Lumley's white face blanched whiter and whiter to a deathly pallor as he listened to the cold horrors of the bloody tale.

When however he had to be told of the arrest of Jules Massey, his indignation became intense.

He would as soon have believed in the guilt of his closest friend, and his legal mind saw the weakness of the case.

He had known Jules Massey as the servant of the murdered man for years, and was it conceivable, he asked, that after a lifetime of faithful devoted servitude, he should turn upon and murder his master in cold blood! Was it possible, he urged, that a person of Jules Massey's mild gentle disposition could have

perpetrated so diabolical a crime! Was it possible, Mr. Lumley asked, that the unpractised hand of Jules Massey could have accomplished so complete a butchery without staining himself with one drop of blood. The very proposition he maintained was too absurd.

Hour by hour, like other days, the dismal day of Bertram Gonault's murder dragged through.

Although at the time of his murder Bertram was under constant medical care, although he might have died if he had not been murdered, yet there was no question as to the cause of death, his poor body had been butchered with a skilfulness, which, if I may so express it, would, if he had been endowed with them, have cut off twenty lives.

In due course a post-mortem examination was made by medical men of the remains, and those last offices were duly and decently performed which, previous to interment, are, by the living, accorded to the dead.

In a kind of semi-state the remains were laid in the great entrance hall, around which the grim armoured effigies, upon their marble pedestals, grasped their tall lances in their iron-bound hands, and seemed to bow their heads and lower their drooping pennons, as though they mourned over the raised catafalque and over the restful presence of the dead.

Of the hundreds of those whom Bertram Gonault employed and fed, who delved and toiled in his mines, who laboured on his lands, who had ministered to his wants, or benefited by his generosity, whether from far or near, all who desired were permitted to look a last look upon his face as it reposed in death.

One by one, a solemn grave-faced awe-stricken multitude they filed past the bier, a melancholy train.

There, in death, lay the remains of what once had been Bertram Gonault, his face evincing as it lay there no signs of pain, even it seemed almost placid considering the violence of his

end, it was a face of marked and noticeable intellectual power, nay sometimes as it was gazed upon in its long long sleep, there seemed to light upon it that almost mocking smile. The long, pointed, well-tended moustaches stood as carefully arranged and as rigid as they had been in life; while upon the side of the right cheek there was the mark which he had borne from his birth, and which he was bearing, to—now so near—his grave. One hand—the left—alone was visible and rested passively across his chest, one long white hand, one finger of which was still, as it lay there, encircled with the massive sapphire ring.

We have said that the face was strangely tranquil, for his wounds were mostly in the body, and as he lay there in the solemn state of death, all the violence which had been wreaked upon the living, as far as possible, was concealed beneath the spotless drapery which shrouded the remains of the dead.

At last those days,—those sad, dark, dreary,

days,—came to an end, when the eyes of the living may be no longer suffered to linger over the remains of the loved that are dead.

Then, as he had mourned for others, he himself was mourned,—as he himself had caused others to be carried, he was carried forth. Out into the bright warm sunshine that he had once enjoyed, where all nature ceased not to smile even on the *cortége* of the dead. They bore him out, over the great wide lawn, where the chaste white marble fountains glistened in the sunlight, and the light summer breezes trifled with the flowers. Then over the broad river did the solemn *cortége* wend its way, over the broad river where in happy days he had loitered and lingered with his love. Silently by the Dower House they toiled up the winding hilly road, up to the hill top where weird, and solitary, and remote, the mausoleum stood among the trees—where it stood in the grove of tall beech trees as they gently bowed their heads, and the yew trees lent their sombre

shadows, and the avenues of cypress seemed to guard the tombs.

It was here that they laid the remains of Bertram Gonault down to rest.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCALES OF JUSTICE.

Mr. Lumley on his arrival at Vernwood, learning what had happened, and seeing the consternation which prevailed, immediately assumed the direction of affairs.

And there is no doubt that had Bertram Gonault had time given him, or rather if he had utilized the time which had been given him, instead of squandering his years in sinful procrastinations and vain regrets, had Bertram Gonault actually come to the point to make any definite disposition of his affairs at all, there is no doubt but that he would before any other person have appointed lawyer Lumley as executor to carry out his wishes when he was gone.

But Bertram had sinfully and madly delayed the day of reckoning and arrangement, and now like a thief in the stillness of the night the time had passed and the opportunity was for ever lost and flown.

In the investigation of the mystery, Mr. Lumley lost no time in calling to his aid the experience and acumen of the detective department of Great Scotland Yard, for although Jules Massey was in custody, Mr. Lumley had no more belief in poor Jules' bloodguiltiness than he had in his own.

Two officers from London had arrived at Vernwood the day following that in the early morning hours of which the murder had been perpetrated. These experienced man-hunters viewed carefully the body of the deceased previous to interment as well as the chamber in which the tragedy was committed, and made a most minute examination of that and the adjoining rooms. They scoured in search of evidence all the surrounding locality both

near and remote, they made particular inquiry into the habits, character, and movements of every person, likely or unlikely upon the estate, but at the end of two or more weeks, after exhausting all the resources which their experience could devise ; whatever they told the world,—for police like doctors put on a wise face and profess not to tell all they know,—but whatever these two detectives told the anxiously inquisitive world, sagely and mysteriously, about suspicions or clues, they had to report to headquarters, and to confess to themselves, that they were as utterly destitute of any shadow of a clue to that dark mystery, and as utterly powerless to point the finger of suspicion to any one individual, as if they had spent those fourteen days in the bosoms of their respective families, or sat on their stools and kicked their heels in their official quarters in Great Scotland Yard.

Neither in the heavily carpeted chamber where the deceased had slept and died, or in

the adjacent room, or on the broad flag stones of the terrace without, or on the hard trodden gravel walk, or on the dry hard turf of the lawn, or in the sandy pulverous soil, had the murderer left trace or track or footprint behind. The dead man's escritoire and papers were apparently untouched, even his valuable ring was left upon his hand, and as far as could be discovered, not an article of value had been taken from the room; yet a murderous hand had been there, and in that short space of time had committed that tenfold atrocious deed of blood.

That Jules Massey was at the spot, there or thereabout, when the murdered man died, there could be no manner of doubt, even he himself did not deny it, but what appeared in the eyes of the local world a lame assertion, was that he was with the dog.

Besides this thinly transparent plea, the simple-minded people in the quiet English shire were none the less disposed to excuse

Jules Massey on account of the blackness of his skin. There was that prejudicial sentiment against him, that the colour of his skin must in some way reflect the blackness of his heart, they in their narrow and simple way of thinking, had scarcely an idea that a black man, a negro born, could be as honest, and true, as innocent and manly, and as spotless in his life as if his skin were white.

Then too Jules had set himself up so high and mighty over them all. Thus the finger of suspicion and scorn which pointed at Jules in his fall was cruelly malign, and had the poor fellow been judged then and there by mob law it is to be feared that his chances of escape would have been small.

In addition to the absence of all evidence that plunder could have been the object of the assassin, no personal motive could be adduced which could account for the commission of the crime.

Personally Bertram Gonault had been be-

loved, he had scattered his wealth about him with a lavish hand; he had ever seen that the hungry was fed, he had clothed the naked and insufficiently clad, he had housed the homeless, and had provided work on no common scale for the unemployed, and had unceasingly cared that poverty and want were things unknown in the borders of his land, and all felt that his untimely death was a calamity of which the consequences must be felt near and afar.

During these gloomy days of tension and expectation, the eager excitement which the tragedy occasioned, far from exhausting itself by its own vehemence, far from exhibiting any signs of abatement, seemed to grow even more and more intense.

The supposed culprit, Jules Massey, in the ordinary course of procedure was brought up before the local magisterial bench on the charge of having committed the crime.

And here all the local forensic genius in the shape of the Briggs element blossomed forth

into full flower, and when at the end of the fourteen days' official investigation, the two London detectives had little or no evidence to give, and went about their work in a blank-faced crestfallen check-mated mood, the wise assertion of Abraham Briggs was, "Of course, of course they could find no clue, because there was no clue to find. That black fellow was the sole human being near the scene of the murder when the deed was done, and he and he alone committed it, or if he didn't with his own hands, he [which in the sight of the law was just as bad] was accessory to the crime."

Again and again was the prisoner remanded, again and again was the protracted magisterial inquiry adjourned, till having threshed out, and sifted, and cogitated, and blundered, and silted through their magisterial brains, every jot and tittle and shred of evidence out of the materials within their reach, so completely that little or nothing more could be thought or said, this local commission of sages seemed to see no

alternative before them but to commit Jules Massey before a higher, and it was to be hoped a wiser tribunal to take his further and final trial on the capital charge.

During all this time, Mr. Lumley, staunch and unfaltering in his convictions of Jules' innocence, took care that all was done that could be done to mitigate the fearful position of the accused. He promised that nothing should be lacking which legal skill could suggest to save him from what Mr. Lumley called so dire a miscarriage of justice.

The local Commission-of-the-Peace, the London solicitor characterized, as "an assembly of muddle-headed 'blunderbusses' with uncommonly long ears."

Thus, for Jules as he was boarded and lodged as the guest of his adopted country in the local police station, the dark weary days dragged heavily on, the darkest, the very darkest of poor Jules Massey's life. It was the time of reaction after the long years which he

had been enjoying of comparative affluence, of importance, and exalted and trusted position and ease. It was for Jules the swing of the pendulum of life from which we are none of us exempt, of which the tune is

> Now we're up and now we're down,
> Now we suffer now enjoy.

Very shortly Mr. Lumley secured for his defence at the approaching assizes at which he was to take his trial, the services of Mr. Wilbraham, a young barrister whose brilliant parts and sound knowledge of criminal law were mounting him, round by round up the steep and laborious ascent to the summit of the ladder of legal emolument and fame.

With regard to the Vernwood property, there were other considerations too, which were pressing heavily on Mr. Lumley's thoughts, and exercising his legal mind. For the Vernwood estate was now in the position of being unowned, without head, without ownership, and without heir, and the interests at stake were

complicated, needing judicious administration, and were large.

And so in due course Mr. Lumley instituted proceedings which were legally judicious and convenient, and in his own interests not unwise. He caused legal proceedings to be taken, in a way that lawyers know exactly how best to bring about, by which the Vernwood estate came under the direction and management of the High Court of Chancery, by which High Court the highly respectable firm of Wyndham and Lumley were appointed stewards, pending the discovery of,—if any such thing existed,—an heir.

Meanwhile Jules Massey, as he languished in "durance vile" was, day by day approaching nearer, and terribly near, the crisis of his perhaps terrible fate—for there can be few other forms of death more terrible than the death upon the gallows, by the common hangman's hand, for a crime which he never committed, of a true, faithful, honest, upright, honest-hearted man.

However it is one of the just causes of congratulation and one of the boasts of the British Constitution, that the hand of its justice should be so judiciously tempered with mercy, that the liberty of the subject should be so jealously and scrupulously as it is, hedged and fenced in, and the hastiness of its judgments so well and wisely restrained.

But at length the time of the Assizes at which Jules Massey was to take his trial on the charge of murdering Bertram Gonault came round.

There was the arrival of Her Majesty's Judges, invested as usual with all the dignity and importance of the representatives of Imperial power, and all the pomp and circumstance which surrounds the representatives of royalty, and the majesty of the law.

The fact that twelve gentlemen are elected before whom a British subject must have the evidence of his sin adjudged even after he has been accused, and before he takes his final trial,

is one of those safeguards which doth hedge and fence the life and liberty of the subject in. And before twelve such gentlemen, at the opening of the Assizes had the case of Jules Massey, on the charge of the murder of Bertram Gonault, to come.

By that august personage the judge—after having been duly empanelled,—were these twelve gentlemen of the Grand Jury charged.

"In the case of the coloured man Jules Massey committed on a charge of the wilful murder of his master, Bertram Gonault," said his lordship, "the magistrates have committed the prisoner to take his trial on the capital charge, but they had done so on evidence which to his, [his lordship's] mind seemed not to be altogether satisfactory or complete.

"He," his lordship continued, "never thought there was anything gained by the ordeal which a trial for murder involved, unless there appeared a reasonable prospect of arriving at a verdict against the accused, for an ordeal surely

such a trial was, it was an ordeal solemn and painful for all concerned.

"But he should leave it to the intelligence of the Grand Jury to say whether sufficiently conclusive evidence had been adduced to warrant the committal of the prisoner to take his trial before the Petty Jury on the charge, and whether in their unanimous opinion there was a *prima facie* case."

Thus shortly were the Grand Jury charged!

After his lordship's charge the twelve Grand Jurymen, under the chairmanship of a gentleman of common sense, retired to do their duty as best they might to their country, and, whether black or white, to their fellow men.

The result of their duty, as far as we are concerned was, that, in Jules Massey's case they failed to find a true bill against the prisoner, and the "said Jules Massey" walked forth from prison before the world, in the light of day, an honest an innocent and a free man.

* * * * *

At this finding of the Grand Jury, among the believers in Jules Massey's innocence of the charge preferred against him which faction was headed by Mr. Lumley, there was of course jubilation in a high degree, while Abraham Briggs sank proportionately low, he sank never to lift his head or show his pleasant face again on the magisterial bench, and to this very day local tradition jocosely asserts that after the Vernwood murder Abraham Briggs in his attention to his magisterial functions was not even lukewarm, and that he spent the leisure hours of his declining years in the cultivation of an improved kind of marrowfat peas.

The tidings of Jules Massey's acquittal reached Vernwood with that marvellous rapidity which, in their respective mysterious ways human tongues and electric wires can transmit news.

If the excitement and tension had been great before the trial it now became if possible more intense.

If Jules Massey was innocent then who was guilty? Did assassination stalk among the people with unfettered hand?

If Jules Massey did not murder his master, then who did?

Such with strained eager face were the questions each one asked.

CHAPTER III.

IN ANOTHER LAND.

We have passed the stage in this history where the dark shades of murder, of death, and disappearance have fallen, and closed in some of those characters with whom we are concerned, hiding them from our eyes.

As again we lift the veil, and raise the curtain of the drama, the scene must be shifted to a distant land.

With its serpentine walks, its shadowy and overhanging trees, its patches of fresh green verdure, and more than all besides, the unique and seldom surpassed views which it affords of marine activity and life, that little oasis of brightness, which forms what we may call the tip of the narrow insulated tongue of land

known as Manhattan Island, on which has sprung up into wondrous activity and commercial life, the busy, teeming, American, metropolitan, cosmopolitan city of New York, the tip of land above referred to, known commonly as Battery Park, forms, when the cool fresh breezes from the ocean neutralize somewhat the fierce heat of the sun on land, or in the stifling purlieus of the crowded streets, particularly in the hotter months of the year, one of the most seductive, and one of the most attractive nooks that can be found, one of the freshest and freest breathing places in the great and busy Empire City.

Here the contemplative may well indulge in reverie, here the idle may be tempted to dalliance, and here even the fatigued may seek repose.

Perhaps it was the almost classic retirement of this spot, standing as it does out of the way of, but at the same time surrounded by, the busy turmoil of the commercial world, that induced

Colonel Keinrich Vander Meulen to choose the vicinity of Battery Park as the head centre of his operations, from which he could take his own peculiar survey, view mankind and the world, as it were, with his own eyes.

The refreshing quietude of the situation, as compared to the dense and feverish rush of life which day by day courses through the busy arteries of the great American City, seemed to favour the development of those mental calculations which had rendered the name of Keinrich Vander Meulen at once the best known, and the most devoutly to be dreaded individuality among the peccant fraternity of his surrounding world.

Oft had the cleverest of rogues to lament that they owed the loss of that blessed boon of liberty,—most valued when it is lost,—to the profound ruminations which passed in the brain of the sagacious Colonel, as he sat enjoying the fragrance of his twenty-cent Havana in Battery Park, his mind actively employed though his

body rested, and his keen dark eye wandered away abstractedly over the distant sea as it lay in its rippling blue, or apparently lazily followed the course of some one of those leviathans of the sea, as she ploughed her way through the deep, or again as the same keen dark eye rested on some white sail which, caught by the winds of heaven, seemed playfully to dance along over the bright bosom of the laughing waves.

High up in one of those many storeyed edifices which seem to be the pride and glory of the American citizen and American cities, in the immediate vicinity of Battery Park, in a small office or room remarkable above most things for its lack of pretension and absence of display in this tiny sanctum—except when he chose to avail himself of the charm and freshness of the park beneath—lived and worked the acutest detective brain of his time.

* * * * *

It was something within three months of the time wherein were enacted the incidents and

events of which the last few chapters have told. For some hours the rush of commercial life in the city of New York had almost ceased; the crowds which daily throng, and jostle, and rub shoulders about all the streets adjacent to the post-office in the one general, almost universal hunt for gold, had relinquished for a few short hours the active adoration of Mammon—the false idolatrous cult of that unholy god—and had quitted the precincts of the marts of trade for various homes, some for villas on the pleasant adjacent islands across the rivers or bay, some for luxurious clubs or hotels, some for the greater quietude of palatial uptown mansions, and some indeed, perhaps the less fortunate, or the less favoured, or the less venturous or bold, had relinquished a daily hard bread-seeking struggle for less bright less favoured abodes.

Day had long faded into night, Wall Street and its adjacent thoroughfares looked like some silent and deserted city of the dead, or echoed only with the occasional footfall and

the leisurely measured tread of the roundsman or patrol.

But late as was the hour, a light, dim and subdued, might have been seen in the high up office window from which, on bright and sunny summer days, Colonel Keinrich Vander Meulen's window commanded views, extensive and beautiful, of New York Bay with its adjacent islands and headlands, while away to the right the great bronze statue of "Liberty"—a great idea with but a limited effect—with upraised arm, enlightened,—certainly a very infinitesimal fraction of—the world.

Possibly the knowing Colonel had selected this elevated position because he admired sea views, or possibly as an eyrie of vantage in order that, with his powerful marine binoculars, he might sweep the horizon, for Colonel Vander Meulen, or as he was familiarly dubbed among his most intimate associates and chums, "Kern," had considered it worth his while to make himself acquainted with the appearance of every

steamer of importance which entered or departed from the port and bay of New York, and reports of arrivals off Sandy Hook were, when the circumstances called for the special attention of the Colonel, known to him about as soon as they were communicated to the ship-owners and ship-owning companies themselves.

As we have said, on the night of which we are writing, the subdued light which appeared in the Colonel's window from without, indicated that his at least of the many offices in the many edifices round about Battery Park was tenanted, notwithstanding the late hour of the day, or rather the advanced hour even of the night; and had the occupant of that office been just at that time aware that his little window was an object of such careful and thoughtful attention as it was from a man who seemed almost furtively, almost fearfully to loiter under the dark shadows of the trees in the park beneath, it is not improbable that jubilation rather than the

dire perplexity which possessed him, would have given another and the prevailing tone to the Colonel's thoughts.

However, at this time, perplexity rather than jubilation was the paramount condition of Colonel Vander Meulen's mind.

Commonly he, with more readiness and perspicuity than most men alive, saw through the motives of human actions. He read mankind and human nature, and human actions as an open book, and what would be incomprehensible enigmas, either social or human, to most men, were, to Colonel Vander Meulen, occurrences as clear as the light of day.

A rather thick heavy looking man, you would have thought him could you have seen him seated in that little office alone. A personality markedly of the American type, but whose ancestors might have been of Teutonic or Dutch, or what in New York is called the old Knickerbocker stock, with straight black hair and keen dark eyes, accompanied by that cer-

tain heavy stolidity which I find not easily describable in mere words, but which one may not unfrequently meet with in association with some uncommon quality of mind—shall I say is often met with in connection with phenomenal parts, for not invariably is genius indicated by the bright intelligent face.

But Colonel Vander Meulen was one of those men, either fortunate or wise, who had chosen the way of life most suited to the talents with which by nature he was endowed ; he was an example of the round man who had found sense enough to fall into the circular hole, for it is a lamentable thing when we see talent in any particular direction misdirected and misapplied, the minister of religion who would have made, for example, a dashing officer in the charge of a brigade, or the merchant who would have been an ornament to the ranks of genius in science or art. I might multiply examples, but Colonel Vander Meulen was none such as these. He was a man eminently

fitted by nature for his own particular *rôle*, and a perplexing one it sometimes proved, and which would have driven most men to their wits' ends, and yet to be baffled in the hunt, to fail in pursuit, was a misfortune which to Colonel Vander Meulen was almost unknown, and so success upon success had rendered him at once one of the most sought for (sought for by the hunters and most dreaded by the quarry) of the human sleuth hounds of his time.

But on the occasion of which I have to tell, Colonel Vander Meulen sat in his little office far into the night. Somewhere up town he had another establishment where there were *bairns* and a *frau*, but just now that seemed no place for him, Colonel Vander Meulen had another game to play, so far into the night he sat in his little office alone. And as he sat there there seemed to pervade him a puzzled, I may almost say a painfully perplexed and troubled air, for once he was almost on the point of

admitting to himself that he was outpuzzled, checkmated, "done."

Must he, must Colonel Vander Meulen, for that once fail in his pursuit?

But man's extremity proves to be God's opportunity more often than we think or own!

Upon a desk before which Colonel Vander Meulen sat in the little office, lay a heap of papers and documents of varied aspect, private, official, and otherwise multifarious.

Singling out one from amongst these, for something like the twentieth time the thinker carefully and deliberately perused its contents.

Its strongly official aspect and savour might have been a little appalling to the uninitiated and unofficial mind, but Colonel Vander Meulen regarded that aspect only as a matter of course, officialism was an *ism* with which he came in contact well nigh every day of his active life.

Surmounted by a woodcut of those two potent and militant representative creatures "the lion

and the unicorn fighting for the crown" the document apparently at once so serious in its purport, and to Colonel Keinrich Vander Meulen so interesting in its details read thus :

"MURDER!"
"£5,000 REWARD!"

WHEREAS on the night or in the early morning of the —th day of August 18— *there died at his residence known as Vernwood, in the parish of* ——, *in the county of* ——, *England, and formerly of Millbank,* —— *County, Virginia, Bertram Honour Gonault, and whereas the said Bertram Honour Gonault met his death by violence at the hands of some person or persons unknown.*

This is to certify, that the above reward of Five Thousand Pounds will be paid to any person or persons, who, not being the actual perpetrators of

the crime, shall give such information as shall lead to the conviction of the parties whereby the said Bertram Gonault met his death.

Any information, which will be treated in strict confidence, may be given by letter or personally to

MESSRS. WYNDHAM AND LUMLEY,
Solicitors,
No. —, —— Street,
Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London."

Such was the document that the detective read through and through. He viewed it naturally, fairly, and as it seemed, as you or I reader would have viewed it with our untutored minds and eyes, he viewed it suspiciously, as he had sense and experience enough to view almost everything in this deception seeking life, he viewed it from behind and before, and he turned it upside down, for none knew better

than he that strange and apparently unimportant and unexpected trivialities may point to important facts, and lead to important ends.

Then he soliloquised, for he was alone.

"Five thousand pounds reward."

"Pile of money at stake too."

Then he continued to read,

"And furthermore. Whereas the aforesaid Bertram Honour Gonault is believed to have died intestate, this is to certify that another and additional reward of Five Thousand Pounds will be paid to any person or persons, who shall give such information as shall lead to the discovery and whereabouts, if living, of his heir or heirs.

Any information on this may be given as above to

Messrs. Wyndham & Lumley,
Solicitors,
No. —, —— Street,
Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London."

For some minutes after perusing these documents the Colonel seemed to relapse into a state of the profoundest thought! he drove his fat fingers through his short straight hair, then he pushed his hands deep into his trouser pockets, as deep as he could, as he sat in his chair, then he threw back his big head and puffed vigorously at the twenty-cent weed which he held between his teeth, all the while watching intently, as if from the dense cloud which arose in circling fumes above his head he hoped to discover some spark of inspiration or relief.

Then changing his position uneasily, and again fumbling and searching among the heap of papers before him he presently drew something else out from the heterogeneous mass.

It was not a document, at least it was not a document in the common and ordinary sense and meaning of the word. For a photograph is not a document, and a photograph is what it was. It was a well executed picture, large and

long, of that particular style and shape known among the professional photographic artists in England as an "imperial."

No mere fifth rate production of skill, no mere amateur attempt at art, was the picture which he held before him, but a costly, naturally, and accurately coloured portrait the work of a master hand.

Fine however as was the picture as an example of the photographic art, it represented a subject horrid and revolting to behold, a subject rendered still more revolting, still more startling—still more life like we cannot say—by the terrible vivid reality which it brought to mind.

It was the face of a man, I may say it was the face and hand of a man *photographed after death.*

The neck and body of the dead, swathed in ample linen folds, seemed to speak suggestively of something beneath the folds too fearful for the eye to be permitted to contemplate, while

the face portrayed, told only too plainly, that the dead had suffered the torture of a painful, nay of a violent death. One hand, the right, was unseen, while the left with its long and bony fingers, the first of which was encircled by a gold and sapphire band ring, lay conspicuously resting across the bosom of the dead.

Realistic and deathlike it was, the picture in its masterfulness seemed to suggest, to conceal as it were, a darker chapter of horrors even than it displayed or revealed.

Colonel Vander Meulen in the course of his professional career had looked upon many horrifying sights. In his military experience he had encountered death in its thousand aspects upon the field, but the picture before him looked sickening and transcended even his experience of the appearance of death, rendered still more ghastly by the apparent laugh almost as if in the last convulsive gasp for life. The eyes were closed, while the well fixed moustache ends turned upwards seemed to enhance the

effect of the sardonic Mephistophelian laugh which lingered on the countenance even in the last long repose of the dead.

Another thing which the observant detective noted was that the right cheek was scarred by some cicatrice, which, although long healed, still left its impress until and after the latest hour of life.

Verily the picture was one to fill the mind with a sense of loathing and disgust. But yet, horrible as it was, it seemed to indicate clearly and truthfully the semblance and character of the countenance during life, but emaciated apparently thinned and stricken though it might be with disease.

Probably the reader who has followed, even though not too closely or minutely in his mind, the revolting details of this horrid picture, may have divined that what Colonel Vander Meulen was gazing at might be a post-mortem portrait of Bertram Gonault.

So it was.

But it was not the portrait of Bertram Gonault as we viewed his remains as they lay in state, as they lay in the mockery of pomp by which the departed are sought to be beautified when for the last time they are to be gazed upon by loving and regretful eyes.

No ; it was a photograph, which those who best knew wherefore they had turned the photographic art to such account, had been secured of Bertram Gonault as quickly as could be after death.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT GHOSTLY MIDNIGHT FORM.

As this prince among detectives held the photograph which we have described in the foregoing chapter in his hand, he, for a moment closed his eyes as if to shut out from both his sight and thoughts all remembrance of the repellent thing, of an art so beautiful subverted and applied to so foul a use.

An audible "Ugh" escaped Colonel Vander Meulen's lips as he threw the picture away face downwards on the pile of papers which lay on his table before him.

Hardly had the ejaculation of disgust escaped his lips when it seemed, almost rather by instinct than by sense, his sharp ear seemed to detect a sound, it was like the presence of a

footstep falling lightly, almost stealthily, upon the lowest step of the many stairs which led to the little office occupied by the prince of police from Battery Park and the street beneath.

No movement seemed to escape the keen vigilance of his acute sense. For a long minute or two he listened intently, all his faculties on the alert, listened as we say with all his ears.

Step by step, with the same stealthy hesitating cat-like tread, it seemed to mount higher and higher, and seemed to approach up the creaking and rather rickety stairs nearer and nearer to where he sat.

The detective as noiselessly reached forth his hand and drew quietly open the right hand drawer of his little office table. There lay his six-shooter ready for instant use, for it was not one of the old soldier's failings to be overtaken by an enemy in a surprise. He was too old a veteran for that. And then it was evident to the solitary occupant of the little den that some

one stood immediately outside his office door Upon it the words "Manhattan Detective Agency" were painted. The letters must have been invisible now, although they were quite large enough for any one to read in the narrow entrance when favoured by the light of day.

Then an interval followed of suspense, there was a dead silence in which Colonel Vander Meulen awaited the further development of events, then there was a stealthy creaking sound then a pause.

At length came a knocking, quiet stealthy and subdued to break the spell, and the next moment Colonel Vander Meulen invited into his presence his would be visitor at so unusual an hour, unusual that is so far as any hours were unusual to a person of Colonel Vander Meulen's habits who, whether by day or by night ever sought his quarry when it might be found.

Then at the Colonel's invitation a tall dark robed figure stepped silently with the same catlike tread, into his little room.

As the new comer entered, he saluted with some show of politeness, while Colonel Vander Meulen seemed to nail on to him instantly his keen, penetrating, searching glance, as with much less of ceremony or politeness, he returned the stranger's salute.

"Have I then the honour of meeting at last in person Colonel Keinrich Vander Meulen, the most distinguished detective officer of the United States?" the visitor asked.

He looked a tall man, tall almost to stateliness, but enveloped in a long dark surtout or cloak, so carefully drawn about him that but little of his real personal figure could be seen.

"Wall yes stranger, if you will, Colonel Keinrich Vander Meulen. I guess that's me right enough, and I thank you for the compliment, although at present you have the advantage, and I'd like to know to whom I'm indebted for the honour of a visit at this hour."

For what by reason of a broad-brimmed, drab-coloured hat, something after the style of Yankeeland, or of the *sombrero* typical of the cowboys and hunters of the western ranches and prairies, and the wide collar of the surtout which was turned up to its fullest extent, only a very small portion of the visitor's face was to be seen. What there was visible, seemed to the attentive searching eye of the detective to look sickly and pale, almost deathly in its pallor, and in its sunken and emaciated lines.

"I am come to see you on business, important business, important perhaps to us both, both to you and to me," continued the mysterious visitant in cold hard tones, which notwithstanding his experience and habitual temerity, seemed to thrill Vander Meulen to the bone.

By a slight bend of the head Colonel Vander Meulen motioned his visitor to proceed. But the detective thought not then just of how

great an astonishment there was in store for him, or of how great a shock he was to endure. Yet there was a fascination about the mysterious presence of the man before him, a fascination which he was unable to mentally explain to himself or to comprehend, he seemed unable nevertheless to unfix his eyes from the tall cloaked figure which rivetted his attention as if by some supernatural spell.

Then there was a pause, a silence uninterrupted by either the one or the other of the two men. An almost awkward pause.

At length again the visitor was the first to speak.

From the ample, voluminous folds of the great surtout which covered him, he drew what the detective saw was a copy of the *New York Herald*, in its place and generation the leading journal of its time, while with his left hand he pointed to an advertisement, one among the many in that unique column of journalism

headed "Personal" in the best known "daily" of New York.

"I should say that advertisement emanates from this office, or from you Colonel Vander Meulen? Is that so?"

Colonel Vander Meulen took the paper for a minute from the long white hand which held it, and carefully glanced the advertisement through.

And this is what he read.

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD!

WHEREAS on the —th day of August, 18—, in the parish of —— in ——shire, England, at his residence known as Vernwood, but formerly of Millbank, —— County, Virginia, U.S.A., there died Bertram Honour Gonault. And whereas the said Bertram Honour Gonault died intestate.

This is to notify, that the above reward of Five Thousand Dollars in United States currency (or £2083 sterling) will be paid to any person or persons who shall give such information as shall lead to the discovery and identification (if living) of his heir or heirs.

And furthermore,

Whereas the aforenamed Bertram Honour Gonault met his death through violence, a farther (and larger) reward

will be paid to any person or persons, who (not being the actual perpetrator of any crime whereby the said Bertram Honour Gonault met his death) shall give such information as shall lead to a knowledge of the circumstances thereof.

Any notification, which will be treated in the strictest confidence, may be made by mail or otherwise to

Messrs. WYNDHAM and LUMLEY, Solicitors,
No. —, —— Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
London, England.

or to

Colonel KEINRICH VANDER MEULEN,
No. —, —— Street, Battery Park,
New York City, U.S.A.

"Yes sir, that is so," Colonel Vander Meulen replied shortly, as he handed the copy of the *Herald* back to the man. "Can you give me the information which I seek?"

The Colonel's visitor laughed a long, low, hollow, gurgling laugh, a laugh almost sardonic in the hollow mockery of its tone.

Self-controlled as he ever was Colonel Vander Meulen's blood began to warm to anger heat.

"The information Colonel? I might or I mightn't give it you. The information! Ay I could, or I can, or rather I could if I would," replied the other in the same hollow tone. There seemed within the man as he spoke a heartless, careless, mockery which was to Colonel Vander Meulen irritating in the extreme.

"But think you my Colonel," he continued, "that five thousand dollars reward would tempt me to unfold to you for your convenience, the mystery which surrounds the life as well as the death, shall I say the life? Ay? yes the life too, which you seek to elucidate and for your own profit to explain, for clever as you are, Colonel Vander Meulen, I can tell you that a mystery hangs around it which, without my aid, even you with all your cleverness, with all your experience, with all your wit, with all your insight into human life, and human action, and human death too, shall fail to unravel or reveal. Say! Years ago you knew Bertram

Honour Gonault in the flesh! was it not so?"

Colonel Vander Meulen nodded assent.

"And now sir you seek, with large offers of reward, both or either his murderers or his heirs? See here Colonel Vander Meulen, look at me as I stand before you to-night. Do I stand before you in the spirit or in the flesh?"

With a flourish almost theatrical in its suddenness and its air, at one movement the speaker, as he finished, threw open the front of the long dark surtout, and with the other hand he removed the broad-brimmed slouched *sombrero* by which his countenance was hid, and there stood before the dazed and astounded detective the unmistakable lifelike apparition of Bertram Honour Gonault.

It was the selfsame personality upon whose photograph five minutes before he had looked as he thought in death.

There he stood, or there *it* stood, unmistak-

able in features, the long thin hands, the finger encircled by the gold and sapphire ring, the pallid emaciated sunken cheek, the right side still scarred by a cicatrice long healed, the same well waxed and turned up moustaches, the same mocking sardonic Mephistophelian laugh, all had been reproduced in the photograph of death as truly as photography could reproduce them, for photography cannot lie. The tell-tale camera must entrap and reproduce the effects of light as surely as the sun produces day.

But here! Was the apparition a merely optical reproduction of the picture on which he had so intently dwelt, or was it truly that the photograph was what he believed it to be, a reproduction of the likeness of death?

Well might this visitor ask, "Do I stand before you in the spirit or in the flesh?"

None of the common, every-day occurrences of life were wont to unhinge the habitual coolness of Colonel Vander Meulen's mind, but as

he stood there far in the night, before, in the presence of a form which began to assume an uncanny aspect in his eyes, his usually sallow ashy countenance blanched and whitened to the livid hue of death, his eyes assumed a wild terrified expression ; for once at least in his life Colonel Vander Meulen, the arch detective, the grand army man, the ex-soldier who had stood firm and undaunted and unwavering under heavy fire in many a charge, glanced nervously round the little office to assure himself that he might believe his own senses and his own eyes ; and almost in the vain hope of discovering some way of retreat from the apparently ghostly supernatural presence before his eyes.

But the tall pale figure, hat in hand, the surtout thrown back, displaying a naked sinewy throat, stood there, stood mysterious and erect, barring all way of exit and escape betwixt him and the door.

For once at least in his life the power of

articulation forsook the gallant Colonel's tongue, his knees trembled beneath him, there was a creepy unhealthy feeling in the very air.

Each stood gazing at the other, the mysterious visitor with dark, deep, languishing, almost poetic eyes.

"Speak Colonel Vander Meulen," he at length continued. "Speak. Tell me what you desire. Have I not known you many a year! Ha ha I see I see your wits seem to fail you," he added in the same hollow mocking tone. "Is that not so ?

"Look you here old friend. You know where the arched bridge of natural rockery spans the highway which crosses Central Park. If every other clue should fail you," said he in the same irritating mocking tone, "(which it surely will, nay, as surely as the sun will fail to illuminate the night), meet me there in one month from this hour, we shall at least be pretty free from interruption then and there.

May be, if you don't in the meantime find that which you seek, may be I can tell you something you may like to know, which I know well enough without my aid you cannot find. Till then Colonel Keinrich Vander Meulen, *au revoir! au revoir!* We shall doubtless meet again. Adieu! Adieu!"

With a wave of his long and thin white hand, on which there sparkled in the gaslight the sapphire gem, the strange visitor as suddenly as he had disclosed his striking personality, drew again about him, with a theatrical-like movement, the thick dark surtout, and covered —I may say concealed—his face beneath the shadow of the broad *sombrero*, and a moment later the office door had closed behind him with a bang and he was gone, and the detective seemed to breathe more freely as if his little office was relieved of the presence of some uncanny thing.

Colonel Vander Meulen listened for the sound of the receding footsteps of his visitor

down the old stairs, but he listened in vain, there was no more sound of footsteps than as if some ghostly visitant trod the thin light air, a perfect silence seemed to reign.

The detective for a moment stood dazed, transfixed as it were to the floor on which he stood.

Then suddenly—it seemed with the quickness of a thought—he recovered himself. Like a flash of intuition his habitual presence of mind returned.

Promptness of action was one of Colonel Vander Meulen's points. To his promptitude, to his faculty of decided action he thought he owed the phenomenal success which he had achieved in his adopted calling since he came to New York a poor man at the conclusion of the war.

Moreover Colonel Vander Meulen, although he believed in strange occurrences, had very little faith in the existence or supernatural appearances of ghosts.

The mysterious visitor had not left Colonel Vander Meulen's presence so much as thirty seconds ere he had recovered his normal state of mind.

One stride brought him to his desk before which we have pictured him sitting ere the mysterious visitant arrived.

With a hard quick blow of his hand he struck a hand gong which stood on his table! The bell rang out with a clear, silvery, musical sound, while in the same instant he blew a sharp short shrill whistle.

Almost simultaneously with the double summons of emergency, well-nigh as silently as his last visitor had departed, a little wizen-faced man glided into Colonel Vander Meulen's little room.

"Shadow that man!" was the curt order that the Colonel gave. "And if you scent him home there'll be a hundred dollars added to your pay. You saw! Long heavy black cloak, face covered with a broad hat. Sharp."

"Right boss!" A significant nod of comprehension and assent was all the answer that was given to the order, and the little wizen-faced man was gone.

CHAPTER V.

"SHADOWING" A GHOST.

THE little thin-faced man who, with such praiseworthy promptness and alacrity, followed the curt order of Colonel Vander Meulen was an instrument of no common usefulness in the hands and under the direction of his chief. Paul Neugass was the well nigh indispensable right hand of the clever New York detective, and who played for him about the same *rôle* as the ferret plays to the ferreter. Between them existed about the same affinity as there exists between the hunter and the hound, and perhaps in this case the astute hunter was indebted for no insignificant measure of his fame and reputation, in what I will call the underground work of his adopted and some-

what peculiar calling, to the sagacity of the hound, or in other words to the humbler instrument whom he employed in the accomplishment and consummation of his plans.

The instrument in this instance, which had come into Colonel Vander Meulen's hands was a small, semi-dried, mummified looking specimen of a living man, who might have been perhaps well on in middle life, but whose age it would have been hazardous to attempt to divine. Such an item of humanity that one may see dropped down as it were into the path of life. Such as scarce any passer by, other than such an one as the ever alert and watchful eye of Colonel Vander Meulen, would have taken any heed or cognisance of if they had met him in the world's hasting throng.

One is tempted of such like odd items of humanity to wonder whence they came. Did they spring from under gooseberry bushes ? and are childhood's little frauds and fictions true ? or do they come from the clouds,

dropped like rain into the din of life, to be mingled with the mire, and trodden under foot of men, their age, their origin, their destiny, their abode, their means of living, and even their manner of dying, are questions which we seem to ask ourselves concerning such, and we seem to ask ourselves in vain.

Colonel Keinrich Vander Meulen had met and noted this dried up atom in the great crowd of New York humanity which, as in any busy and great metropolis daily and hourly surged past him on his road of life; he had thought that there seemed some qualities in him, lonesome and despised as he might appear, which not every man possessed, and from the hour that the detective had plucked him like some forgotten fossil out of the human throng, he had discovered too much gold beneath the unpretentious surface to lose his man. Gold in this case meant an acute appreciation of human motives, for human motives were the commodities which formed the major

portion of the great detective's stock in trade. His working capital might be small as other men compute their working capital, by pounds, shillings and pence, or by dollars, cents and dimes, but the stock and working capital of Colonel Vander Meulen consisted mainly of brains, and what he possessed of these he turned to no insignificant account.

At the sound of the mention of the 100 dollars reward the little ferret-like man darted from the presence of his director and master with a zealous alacrity which seemed to say that a hundred dollars, dirty or clean, in his pocket and estimation too, was worth a struggle to gain, and Colonel Vander Meulen, unerring as he ever was in his estimation of human character, had gauged to a nicety the precise value that $100 would possess in his assistant's eyes.

The Colonel's mysterious visitor, now wrapped closely in his surtout, his face studiously concealed from all ordinary scrutiny, had barely

reached the pavement from his interview, when, stealthily the noiseless tread of his shadower was on the bottommost stair. With long deliberate strides the dark form crossed the open space before the office building and passed out again under the overshadowing trees of Battery Park, thence by the music stand out on to the open area fronting the sea.

This usually rather favourite lounging place, was at this time of night almost deserted by the sprinkling of idlers, and the very motley throng of the overflow and *residuum* of many European nations, which, after passing through the barge office from the ocean steamers, may almost any day be seen there, and among the former who seem generally to find it an agreeable resort, for the hour was late, and soon the numerous near and distant clocks of the Empire City would be chiming their midnight tunes.

For a few minutes the tall dark form stood by the sea, apparently gazing intently away on

to the broad expanse of that noble harbour, the Bay of New York.

With a melancholy cadence the wavelets lapped and splashed and surged against the breastwork, and seemed to be uttering continuously, as if for ever and for ever, their chilling saddening moan.

In various directions away out upon the waste of waters moving groups of light marked the course of some of those many strange looking ferry boats which form, whether by day or night, so striking a feature of New York harbour, appearing, as they ploughed their ways across over the dark surface of the waters, like wandering constellations of the sea.

But the tall cloaked man as he stood there seemed to regard these as one to whom, rather than any novelty, they were daily or nightly sights.

As he gazed he uttered an ejaculation, and seemed to laugh right out to himself again the same long hollow mocking laugh. But he was

all the while unconscious or regardless of how closely there lingered near him that little grey coated figure scarcely perceptible in the gloom.

One even less self contained, less absorbed in his own reflections than he was, would have failed to take any special note of the insignificant nobody who seemed merely as it were by chance to be lingering near. But even a nobody may have sharp eyes and ears.

Having apparently satisfied his desire for a survey of the sea, Colonel Vander Meulen's late visitor turned his face towards the city.

With slow and deliberate steps, and still pensive air, he crossed again underneath the trees and entered Greenwich Street where the elevated railway issues from the park.

As is usual here, many rough looking men of many and various nationalities were loitering around the numerous liquor stores and low employment offices with which this locality abounds. But all possible contact with these

the tall man seemed carefully to avoid, and kept along beneath the iron framework of the elevated railway to his right, on the least frequented side of the street.

This apparent desire to escape observation was noted by the shadow, who followed as closely the substance, almost, as the natural shadow of the latter would have done, had he been walking in the rays of the moon, or beneath the brilliant sunlight of day.

Turning then through various minor streets to his right, and passing Trinity Church the shadowed substance came into Broadway just opposite its junction with Wall Street, a point by day so full of the bustle, and activity, and intensity of struggling humanity, the very commercial centre of at least the western world.

But as the dark figure stood just at that time on the pavement of Broadway, there reigned around him a stillness almost complete, that quietude which seems to brood as it were, to

weigh down so heavily at night over an unpeopled and deserted city.

The locality was wrapped in a much deeper solitariness than the vicinity of the Bank of England or the Royal Exchange, the corresponding centre of our own commercial life in London would have been at the like hour, for voluminous and multifarious as is the trade of America and of New York, and abounding as is its wealth, and as is the activity and intelligence of American life, it does not yet surpass, either by night or day, the vitality and energy of our own mighty capital city.

But the stranger tarried not, or if at all he lingered only for a moment, with an apparent look of caution or suspicion, as if to make sure of his surroundings, or to listen for a moment to the bells of Trinity Church which chimed out the midnight hour as he passed. But circumspect as he was, he wist not how close a watch was on his every movement by the eye of that insignificant, almost invisible nobody

who kept himself hugging so closely in the dark shades and recesses of the opposite buildings and walls.

Then, re-assured, on he strode, and ever as actively, as silently, as vigilantly, as watchfully the little shadow came behind.

The vicinity of the New York Post Office, the *Herald* Office, and the City Hall were quickly reached, and then as quickly left behind, and they soon came into the midnight activity and glare of the Bowery, where the many brilliantly illuminated saloons and beer gardens told loudly the melancholy truth how money earned, perhaps hardly earned, by day, was dissipated in the orgies and the loathsome license of the night.

The thoroughfare of New York known as the Bowery is one perhaps without its equal in any English or perhaps continental European city,—and perhaps in the past the more so than to-day,—in the unenviable character of its frequenters. Here the gambler pursues his

engrossing pastime, the rogue and the blackleg practise their unholy arts, while the harlot and the *escroc* lure dollars, dimes, and greenbacks from the pockets of provincials from the Eastern or Western States of the Union, or by fleecing simple emigrants as yet unsophisticated in the abounding pitfalls of the vast and complex nation whose wealth, as yet uncounted and unknown, they have come from the overflowing countries and cities of Europe to explore.

As in Venice the East has met and commingled with the West, as the present fraternises with both the future and the past, so in New York City, beyond all other places of to-day, the opposing tides of civilisation and barbarism, of enterprise and decay have met ; the luxury, the refinement and art of the old world, have flown ever westward to mollify, to soften, to refine, and perhaps even to vitiate the new, there has been a fusion of nationalities into one not inharmonious, not ungraceful, not incongruous whole ; the descendant of the Teuton

has met and laboured hand in hand with the descendant of the Goth, the Hebrew trades with the pale-faced small-footed Celestial, the warm blooded Southerner lives beneath the same sky as the Norseman inured to unceasing snows, the eagle-eyed sallow-faced Yankee lives side by side with the negro mild of eye and black of skin, south meets north, the east touches the west, all combining into one common weal, under one presidency, submitting to identical laws, produce a cosmopolitanism perhaps without precedent in the history of time.

Through a midnight crowd such as might be the outcome of this, on and on beneath the flare of the gaslight, amid the brawl or debauch, both watched and watcher passed, the former shunning observation where he could, the latter losing sight not for one instant of his charge.

It was such close attention as this to his work, that had won for the little shrivelled up,

thin faced German, Paul Neugass, the golden opinions of his chief.

Now passing out of the noisy and crowded thoroughfare of the Bowery near the Cooper Union, from the glare of the lamplight and the chatter of its crowd, they passed along till they came into Union Square, where, still closely dogged and watched, the leader loitered on the seats, or lingered beneath the foliage of the trees, then on again, along East Fourteenth Street, till First Avenue was gained. Here he seemed to accelerate his pace, as if, as soon as possible to pass from its poorer habitations.

So rapidly indeed did the tall man stride along, that the little German had to quicken his walk into a shambling run to maintain his ground. But still, on, and on, and on, they both strode, or shambled, or ran, both the pursuer and the pursued. Street after street and block after block were passed.

For the information of those acquainted only with the haphazard and unplanned arrange-

ment of the streets of the cities whose foundations are of the past, of the old world and of our own country, I may tell that the newly built, or as we may dub them the mushroom cities of the American Continent, and of the more recently settled parts of the new world, are generally laid out on a right angular plan, which although it will undoubtedly deprive generations yet unborn of a picturesque antiquity, is yet more fitted for the daily requirements of our present life.

The City of New York is no exception to,—nay it is a double confirmation of,—this common rule, for while the lower streets of that city, or the end of the narrow tongue of land known by the old Indian name of Manhattan Island, now so densely covered with buildings, appears to have been built upon by each settler or speculator according to his own fancy, both minus principle and devoid of plan, the newer and higher, or uptown streets of the city, have been made to follow the general rule of broad and

often handsome avenues running parallel each to each, crossed at right angles by convenient streets, both streets and avenues being oftener known by consecutive numbers rather than by any distinguishing name.

At the foot of East Thirty-third Street the waters of the East River lap ever restlessly against a pier or landing stage, upwards of a hundred feet in width, of strong rough woodwork, supported beneath by a huge and massive framework of sea-embedded, wooden piles.

This landing stage has been erected for the accommodation of vessels, but only a very small proportion, out of the many craft which annually bathe their keels in the waters of New York harbour have any business on this side of the city.

About this locality, a few coal vessels and coasters of minor tonnage only, come to discharge their cargoes on to the rough wharves, while the large ocean liners which ply between New York and Liverpool and other European

ports, the greyhounds of the ocean, whose speed and performances are the talk of the maritime world, these and other large ships have berths assigned to them mostly on the other side of the tongue of land occupied by New York City.

Thus with the exception of a few manufacturing premises, the locality is not a busy one by day, and at midnight it has a doubly forlorn and deserted aspect. The adjacent manufactories there are, are silent and closed, while the tall many storied blocks of tenement houses, let out in flats, which form almost everywhere a feature of New York, add nothing to its liveliness at this hour.

It was at this crossing of East Thirty-third Street and First Avenue that the tall mysterious visitor to Colonel Vander Meulen turned out of First Avenue towards the extreme end of the street, and strode on towards the broad woodwork landing stage or pier.

The ferret still followed the scent with the

same steady persistent instinct, like that of any old and practised hound, there was no faltering, no flagging, no losing sight for a moment of his game.

Then the heart of the pursuer seemed to give a leap within him, as the turning of the latter out of First Avenue appeared to promise him that at last, the end of his long and arduous chase was in view.

He knew enough of the locality to think that the only object that his quarry could have in view, by turning, as he did, to the foot of East Thirty-third Street, must be to reach, either the entrance to one of the few tenement houses near, or else to go on board some small trading vessel lying at or near the landing stage, probably the latter, for the turning which he took must bring him into a *cul-de-sac* of which the rolling tide of the East River was the impassable bound, hence he concluded joyfully and naturally that at last he had dogged his quarry home.

At the foot of East Thirty-third Street, where the huge platform of the landing stage juts out into what is known as the East River, being little less indeed than an arm of the sea, the tide at times, runs out towards the Atlantic Ocean with a tremendous, almost I may say a fearful force and speed.

A cold wind was then blowing from the sea, and as the stranger reached the end of the pier he drew the great black surtout more and more closely about his tall form, looking almost spectre-like and appalling as he stood there alone in the chill and cutting air of the night.

But he could no more distinguish the little grey coated watcher, as the latter skulked in the dark shadows thrown by the flickering gas lamps upon the woodwork near him, than, as travellers tell us, they can discern those strange mimitic insects, which have the power given them by nature, of simulating the surrounding foliage of the trees whereon they hide, or can be seen that curious reptile the chameleon

which reflects the hue of the object upon which it sits.

Directly opposite across the East River were reflected in the tide the countless gas lights of that locality, forming a continuation of the great New York suburb of Brooklyn, known as Long Island City, while between the rough wooden pier upon which they stood, and the distant lights, which border the opposite shores, some two miles or more away, the surging tide of the East River rushed towards the ocean at a terrific speed.

The puzzled little detective, from his lurking place in the shadow of the woodwork, anxiously noted every movement of his man.

He was not long kept in suspense, for within a few minutes of the arrival of the latter on the landing stage, a short sharp shrill whistle fell upon the detective's ear as he lurked not five paces away. There sounded the quiet splashing of a stealthily handled oar in the water beneath the heavy woodwork of the landing

stage, and craning his neck the little German caught sight of a boat in which sat one man. The next moment to his inexpressible disgust Paul Neugass saw the tall black cloaked figure slide down from the broad platform into the boat, which, with apparently not a moment's loss of time, was pulled out into the stream, into the roaring tide, where any boat except under skilful management, could scarcely hope to live.

In his excitement and wrath the little man almost sprang from his ambush, he craned his neck and strained his eyes across the gloomy midnight surging flood, but rapidly all sight both of boat and men were lost to his view in the intervening gloom.

"Ten tausand tamnations," ejaculated the little German. "Dere goes my hundeerdt dollars all into the East Ribare: Mein Gott!"

For some fifteen minutes he paced the landing stage in his bitter disappointment, overflowing with anger and mortification, and then

with the crestfallen air of some cur which has received a castigation, he began again to retrace his fruitless steps, all the while bitterly lamenting and cursing his ill luck.

CHAPTER VI.

A DREAM OF GOLD.

THE night of his long, persistent, but fruitless pursuit had gone, the day had dawned, and it was in the fresh bright coolness of the New York morning that Paul Neugass, in a wearied dispirited mood, sought to report himself to his chief.

It was, as we know, near upon the hour of midnight when the long stern chase began, for, as we said in the last chapter, just as the two, the watcher and the watched, lingered a minute near Trinity Church, at the top of Wall Street and Broadway, the clocks of the Empire City were chiming the midnight hour.

As we have hinted too, in the previous chapter, Colonel Vander Meulen's domestic hearth lay some long way up town.

But the Colonel, for the convenience of special work or special and unexpected emergencies such as this, had an arrangement whereby, with but little or no inconvenience to any one, he could settle himself down, in a smaller apartment or closet adjoining his little city office, for the night.

On the night of which we are writing, Colonel Vander Meulen's mind was too deeply absorbed and puzzled by the strange incident of the evening, and too much exercised by his interview and his strange mysterious interviewer, and too much interested in the result of Paul Neugass's shadowing to give much thought to his domestic hearth.

Soon, therefore, after he had despatched the little ferret man on his midnight hunt, not knowing how many hours, or for that matter how many days, the latter might be absent, being at the same time most anxious to learn at the earliest moment its result, the perplexed detective unrolled and flattened out a roll of

regulation-looking bedding, which was much after the look of that which we see used in convict prisons, and proceeded to settle himself in his down-town quarters for the night. Then at last, after another long spell of silent reflection, Colonel Vander Meulen partly undressed, stretched himself upon his hard regulation-looking bed.

But it was not really to win repose.

Hour after hour his brain was active, unrestful, and in an unceasing whirl, thought after thought, conjecture after conjecture rushed through his mind, and the balm of sleep refused to close his eyes. He rolled and turned and tossed uneasily on his uncomfortable bed; his mental, and it seemed too his physical, vision as well was haunted by the almost ghostlike and unnatural figure of the tall cloaked pale-faced man, and with it, in alternation, there worked on his mind the strange mysterious similarity between the visage of his visitor, and that horrid picture

which photography and art had so vividly and so realistically depicted as in death.

As for Colonel Vander Meulen, he was a man of shrewd and practical mind, devoid of sentiment, devoid almost of any faith as to any other world, and the doctrine and faith in spiritualism and ghostly visitations formed no part of his belief.

Veteran as he was, he had been hardened and sharpened by many a knock and many a rub against a hard and biting world.

Myths of spiritual manifestations were to him the mere phantom bogeys of simple childhood, even death itself was as nothing in his eyes, he would have faced without fear or trembling a whole regiment of ghosts ; and in his campaigning nights and days he had slept soundly when death lay scattered around him well-nigh as plenteously as the withered autumnal leaves which the bleak north wind had scattered from the trees.

Thus, that the dead could rise and present

themselves bodily to the living, was a thing quite outside his rational belief.

That the photograph which he held of the dead, was an exact delineation and likeness of the living, no manner of doubt either existed in his puzzled mind. As he thought it out, the whole circumstance exceeded his experience, and was one that he could account for by none of nature's common ordinary laws.

But at length, puzzled, wearied, perplexed by thoughts like these, Colonel Vander Meulen's eyes gradually closed, and sleep at last came to him in the vision of a golden dream.

Yes ! Colonel Vander Meulen slept.

He dreamt that before his eyes, but ever beyond his reach, backward and forward, here and there, to and fro, there hung, and dangled, and swayed, and swung, an enormous bag of greenbacks and gold—American and English notes and gold, at which in his restless slumber the sleeper thought he grasped. But each time

that he clutched, as he thought, the coveted treasure, away again it swung beyond his reach.

Then in some inexplicable way, in his perplexed imagination, in a way he could not comprehend, in a way as there comes to us in the chaotic visionary of a dream, his tall dark visitant of the previous night was associated with the tantalizing nightmare of the bag of gold.

Then another, whom Colonel Vander Meulen imagined in his dream was the murdered man, but as he appeared in life, appeared before him. Yes, he saw with that vividness which the phantoms of sleep sometimes assume, the vision of the murdered man whose likeness, as in death, he had held in his hand, he saw him as in life—saw Bertram Gonault.

And then Colonel Vander Meulen awoke.

It was the very early morning when the sleeper first unclosed his eyes.

With an effort and a groan he threw

himself from his comfortless and unrestful bed. Then, from the lofty standpoint of his little window, he looked forth on to the outer world.

Through the clear unclouded ether, which hung over the broad bay of New York, the bright sunlight of the early morn was glancing and sparkling through the tossing waves of the emerald sea, while on either hand the far-off promontories of Staten Island and the opposing headlands and islands, were thrown into apparently near and bold relief by the medium of the atmospheric rareness through which they were viewed, and over both land and sea there hung that bright ethereal sheen which throws, by comparison, our beloved but misty fog-bound British Isles, as it were into the shadow of another and darker world.

Young as was the day, out upon the sea the marine world was alert and active with the movements of every shape and size and variety of sea-going craft, and both on land and sea

the New York world was busily and actively astir.

New Yorkers generally are essentially types of that mythical creature which has passed into old world proverb known as the "early bird," and the New York variety is perhaps impelled by a strong predilection for the earliest obtainable worm.

Be that as it may, the feeling of the New York morning is such as especially to invite, nay even—if I may use so strong a term—to entice mankind to early labour, and the cool exhilarating intensity of freshness of the New World morning, outshines and surpasses anything we experience or enjoy of matutine freshness and beauty in the old.

When Colonel Vander Meulen awoke, and issued from the inner recesses of the tiny *sanctum sanctorum* within which he had passed the latter part of his night, or rather of the morning, and where with such scant success he had courted the sweet and soothing in-

fluences of repose, he found the little grey-coated ferret man Paul Neugass returned, and very humbly awaiting an audience at the earliest re-appearance of his chief.

"Well?" was the first word addressed interrogatively, and so full of meaning, put by the chief to the little dried-up man.

"Ach mein Gott, Mein Herr, dat tam long son-of-a-hound, him gib me de go! de clean go!"

Such, as near as I can reproduce the mongrel polyglot, were the words in which Paul Neugass answered his chief.

Then, in the same broken mongrel jargon, he went on to describe the course of his midnight shadowing and its unsatisfactory result which we already know.

As the little German, or whatever he was, blundered through his narration in his odd mixture of tongues, Colonel Vander Meulen, *en déshabillé*, his arms folded, standing within arm's length, kept fixed on the funny cringing

grey-coated little bit of a nobody, his stern keen searching eye, it was a look almost calculated to make the poor little dispirited man quake ; then as the underling came to the sum total of his night's work, which, added up, came so very nearly to such a great conspicuous naught, the heavy hand of Vander Meulen swept round with a force, which, much as a butcher fells a calf, would have brought the little man almost breathless and helpless to the ground.

But it was not the first time that Paul Neugass had experienced the force of these violent ebullitions in the temper of his chief ; he foreknew what he would have to expect, and ducking his head, as we see sometimes boys act in their play, he fell suddenly to the ground in order to save himself from being felled, and if knocked he might not have far to fall.

We need not detail, but with poor Paul Neugass that was not a happy day.

Proceeding to the completion of his attire, but all the while pouring out upon the unhappy little man copiously of the vials of his wrath, Colonel Vander Meulen sallied forth, leaving his wretched little slave—for if prohibited formally by law, and abolished by Act of Congress, the spirit of slavery, that is the harsh dominion of the strong over the freedom of the weak, is not altogether extinct in the United States—in what we may call a happily contrite state, happily rid of his tormentor, but in his inner heart devoutly contrite and repentant, but his penitence lay mostly in the loss of his promised hundred dollars reward.

The disappointed and angered detective, Vander Meulen, pursued his walk till he reached a large restaurant, where, notwithstanding the early hour of the day, the rush of waiters, and the clatter and clash of platters, plates and pans, and the steam and odour of cooked viands, strongly pervaded the air. For the predilection of the New Yorkers, as afore-

said, for the pursuit of the earliest worm, necessitates the devouration of an early repast; and many restoratory establishments in New York City are open and ready, at any hour in the twenty-four, for the replenishment of the inner man and the entertainment of guests.

Having performed this necessity satisfactorily enough, but withal in a cross-grained perplexed and ill-tempered mood, the Colonel did what many a time and oft he had done before—he repaired again to Battery Park, sought a place under the shadow of the trees from which his eye could roam away on to the rippling blue, and lighting a cigar, sought again to explain to himself, and disentangle the perplexity of his mind, and to ponder in all its bearings over the strange mystery of the previous night.

As he revolved the situation in his mind, there appeared in part in his waking mind, a repetition of just that which had appeared to him in his previous night dream, for hither and thither, to and fro, there swayed and

swung before the eye of his mind, the enormous bag of English and American greenbacks and gold, there dangled before his mental vision those alluring tempting words, "Five Thousand Pounds Reward!" "Five Thousand Pounds Reward!" his eye saw, and the music seemed to ring and tingle in his ears to the tune of "Five Thousand Pounds Reward!" "Five Thousand Pounds Reward!" Thus he mused and thus he had dreamed.

Then once again the current of his musings changed, and under the light of day he essayed to unravel the mystery of the night.

How many have done the same!

With what different eyes do we regard our actions and surroundings when we look at them in the cool calm light of morning, to the view we took of them in the heated atmosphere of the night!

How many crimes and follies would men stand guiltless of, for which they must now be adjudged, if instead of in the heated atmosphere

of night they had viewed their consequences in the cool calm light of day!

That morning Colonel Vander Meulen's experience differed from what it usually was, for instead of becoming more enlightened, the episode of the night appeared to him only the more perplexing when viewed by the light of day, till finally, being unable to arrive at any other rational conclusion than that he was being befooled, utterly befooled, he waxed wroth.

To an able man of Colonel Vander Meulen's temperament not many things are more exasperating than the conviction that he has been befooled, been made the sport and dupe of some inferiorly endowed mind, and that, under extraordinary circumstances, for some inexplicable purpose, and in this mysterious manner, was the only thing which Colonel Vander Meulen could think.

And yet what conceivable object in thus deceiving or misleading him could they have who had placed and dangled thus the "Five

Thousand Pounds Reward," so temptingly before his eyes.

How that tempting bait had come in Colonel Vander Meulen's way at all it is incumbent on us, for the reader's enlightenment, to explain.

In one of the earlier chapters of this story, we had occasion to mention a visit by Bertram Gonault, under Mr. Lumley's advice, and under circumstances so painful that we need not recapitulate them, to a small office or room in London in the immediate vicinity of Whitehall.

Poor Bertram Gonault's visit to that small office, being at that time unproductive of any appreciable results, the episode was one on which we did not then enlarge or pursue, and which was allowed to drop out of our narrative.

But present circumstances impel us to bring that tiny den and its tenant more fully and more immediately before the reader's view.

And thus we will explain.

However dirty the work entrusted to them by confiding clients may sometimes be, however, by the black sheep of the profession, the obligation may be sometimes disregarded or infringed, it is a class and professional obligation, rigidly imposed upon the legal fraternity of England, that they appear in the eyes of the world with (we mean morally) clean hands.

Even such highly respectable and reputable practitioners as Mr. Lumley (who would have no more thought of dishonouring or degrading his profession than he would have thought of diving into Hades), in the interests of clients have sometimes not altogether clean-handed—we do not say disreputable—duties to perform, and perhaps for the performance of those duties by proxy there exists a class of men such as was Doctor Sirius Wells.

It hath passed into proverb that "the highest knowledge of mankind is man," while another equally sapient saw inculcates the equally sage admonition, "know thyself, O man."

But however well he understood mankind, a complete knowledge and understanding of himself was a height of wisdom which Doctor Sirius Wells, the inhabitant of the little den near Whitehall, admitted that he never had attained.

Even wherefore he had come to be called "Doctor" seemed like an unfathomable mystery in his own eyes, seeing that he knew as little of the art of healing sick humanity as he knew of divinity, or music, or common law, or almost any and every other of those polite sciences to which the honourable title of "Doctor" is applied.

Then why his godfathers and godmothers in his baptism had called him Sirius was another enigma in his eyes. Why hadn't they called him after a Rothschild or a Vanderbilt, or some other eminently financial name; or after some gold, or silver, or petroleum, or copper, or cotton king, whom he could have made up to while on earth, sooner than have named him

after that brilliant and stupendous luminary known as the Dog-Star which, as it appeared nightly to him in the mouth of the constellation of "Canis Major," was fine enough for all that he could think of it, but was situated an unlimited number of millions of miles away at some remote place in the heavens, and quite beyond his reach.

So argued sometimes to himself Doctor Sirius Wells.

But the freaks of our godfathers and godmothers at our baptisms, just like the freaks of those who give us our nicknames in our early days and early life at school, are unaccountable and strange, and hence perhaps had the individual whom we have under review come to be called "Doctor" Sirius Wells.

And this Doctor Sirius Wells in doing certain work such as it would have been *infra dignitate* for the eminently respectable firm of Messrs. Wyndham and Lumley to have in their office, or to personally perform, had been

in a certain sort of way the intimate of Mr. Lumley for many a year.

However much of an enigma Doctor Sirius Wells was to himself, however humble he might be, as often happens, he was not quite such a puzzle to some others who knew him; and Mr. Lumley for one saw him through and through, and beneath the unpretentious exterior the sensible lawyer was quick to recognise the superior parts of the man.

From the pinnacle of his loftily respectable legal standing, and the exclusive halo of conservatism in which he lived and breathed, Mr. Lumley looked down upon Doctor Sirius Wells with something of the same magnanimous tolerance with which the great dog Monk probably looked down upon an inferior hound. Yet for all that, the self-important lawyer did not despise his usefulness, nor scruple when he needed to turn it to his own account.

In pursuit of the inquiry into the mystery which surrounded the Vernwood tragedy, Mr.

Lumley allowed the officials from Great Scotland Yard all the rope they could desire. He did not, however, at the same time fail—as he believed every theory yet suggested as to the murder to be at fault—to call into his own counsel, in attempting some elucidation of the dark crime and its mystery, the good offices and shrewdness of his own *familiar* Doctor Sirius Wells.

Not that he allowed the latter to obtrude his services, suggestions or opinions to the degradation of the accomplished man-hunters of the State.

Intimate and familiar as he was, of course the important London conveyancing solicitor, whose practice lay mostly in the transfer of broad acres, and whose extensive *clientèle* was composed of the various gradations of the superior ten, and underneath whose massive dining-room table might sometimes even be found the understandings of British peers, of course he did not invite his useful familiar

inside that almost princely appointed house, of which he was the tenant, in the very exclusive vicinity of Lancaster Gate. But for all that there were a good many evenings, when Mr. Lumley was supposed to be late, or later than should be, at that quiet (that is quiet for the heart of London) office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, but when in reality he had quitted his office for hours, and the lawyer and his *familiar* were putting their heads quietly together, after business time, in some quiet out-of-the-way restaurant in some out-of-the-way corner of town, in a privacy which all who know London ways know may be very private indeed.

"Poor young feller came from Meriki fust, didn't he?" said the doctor musingly, towards the conclusion of a long consultation at one of these *tête-à-têtes*, and at which Mr. Lumley had stood a little dinner to sharpen his familiar's wits and to warm his familiar's heart.

"Yes," said Mr. Lumley, who was lounging back on a luxurious plush-covered divan seat;

and the pale sallow faced lawyer held up in the line of vision between his eye and the gas light a ruby coloured glass through which he pensively and intently admired the beauteous tint of the ruby wine.

Contrary to the condition of many imbibers, Mr. Lumley's white face looked as if a few additional glasses of the ruby beverage would have done him good.

"Well, there's a kind o' kinsman of mine in pretty much the same line o' business as ours in New York. As long as we can pick no top nor tail to this business here no harm could be done as far as I see by sending particlers to him."

"Emphatically, No. Why didn't you tell me that before?" responded the lawyer in an annoyed tone.

"Well, you see I thought if there was any plum to be picked up out o' this job, we might as well pick it as for it to go to Meriki where they've got too many plums already."

Doctor Sirius Wells, though endowed with rather more, a good deal more, than one ordinary man's share of shrewdness, was plain and homely in dress, manner and speech; for as too often happens the empty-headed seek to attract admiration by an ostentatious external display, while humility and brains lodge together like bosom friends.

And certainly rather than a man who knew and understood humanity in all its phases, frailties and subtleties, you would have taken Doctor Sirius Wells, if you didn't know him, for some recent importation from an English agricultural shire enjoying a holiday in town.

But beneath this homely guise there lay an intelligence which verily it was futility itself to attempt to hoodwink or deceive.

"If you have connections in New York, Wells," enjoined the lawyer, "dispatch thither every detail, and don't delay a day."

And thus it came that within fourteen days of that *tête-à-tête* of Mr. Lumley and Doctor

Sirius Wells in the quiet corner of London, that, accompanied by the deliciously tempting offer of £5,000 reward, very minute details of Bertram Gonault's death in all its grim mysterious surroundings, reached the office, and were under the careful consideration of Doctor Sirius Wells' remote kinsman and correspondent whose acquaintance we have made, as Colonel Vander Meulen, of Battery Park, New York.

After due inquiry and mature thought which had thus far proved fruitless of results, Colonel Vander Meulen rather reluctantly came to the conclusion that he must be prepared to sacrifice part of the honorarium which was offered to him, and as we have already seen, call in the potent influences of that curious "personal" column of that far reaching "Daily," *The New York Herald*, to his aid.

The strange result of the powerful and tempting appeal which circulated through the American world was a result which had utterly

surpassed the expectations even of the experienced private detective of New York.

To those unacquainted with the American newspaper world we may say it has achieved an advance in what we, almost with hesitation, call civilization, to which the old world is yet new, and the "personal" column of *The New York Herald* is a journalistic study through which the follies and foibles of poor weak humanity seem to shine often with a funniness delegating the "agonies" expressed in some of our own national daily broadsheets into the shade.

Thus the potency of the press, the far-reaching influence of the instrument he had moved, Colonel Vander Meulen knew, he knew it well, but he never knew that the power of an advertisement in *The New York Herald*, with a handsome offer of reward attached thereto, could re-tempt from their graves the very murdered dead.

CHAPTER VII.

LIGHT ATHWART THE GLOOM.

HAVING thus by a cursory retrospect seen how it was that the Vernwood murder case had come into the American private detective's hands, we will return to a relation of the course the affair was taking in the City of New York.

From the night and morning on which that mysterious visitant presented himself at the American detective's office, and the little ferret man Paul Neugass had lost the scent, through the elusive tactics of his quarry, for many days nothing to enlighten the sorely perplexed Vander Meulen, or to add so much as the shadow of a clue to his man,—nothing transpired, no single ray of light seemed to fall across the impenetrable gloom.

But Colonel Vander Meulen knew the wisdom which lies in the core of the French proverb which teaches that "everything comes to him who knows how to wait," and so, if he could do nought else, a waiting game Colonel Vander Meulen resolved to play.

However, Colonel Vander Meulen did not believe in an idle listless waiting. The kind of waiter to whom he believed that everything would in due time come, was the waiter who waited with his eyes wide open and all his faculties and intelligence actively on the alert. In fact on to the passive proverb of France the wise Colonel tacked the active saw of England, which says "God helps those who help themselves." So while trusting to his luck Colonel Vander Meulen did not for a moment forget to make use of his own brains.

This is a useful lesson to learn.

But the information that either Colonel Vander Meulen's luck or his brains brought him amounted to about nothing at all.

Day after day Paul Neugass was sent touting about in all the likely and unlikely corners of New York and Long Island City, in hopes that either by stratagem, or inquiry, or by chance he might again catch a sight of his man.

But as the days passed by it seemed as if he might as well have hunted in the streets of the Empire City for dropped greenbacks and gold.

But at last, suddenly, and unexpectedly, out of this profound mystery and darkness there came a bolt like a ray of light as from a rift in some dark impenetrable cloud.

That midnight race, and confusion, and terror, and tare which on exaggerated occasions attract vast concourses of excited spectators in the English capital of London, was occurring in the City of New York but on a still grander and more magnificent scale.

Yes, on a still more magnificent, still more appalling scale was occurring in the City of New York.

Higher and higher, stronger and stronger,

leaped and mounted the lurid flames, as a devouring apparently irrepressible conflagration seemed to wrap and fondle in their consuming folds an apparently doomed and devoted city.

Across the dark vista of the rushing, rolling, surging waters of the East River, as viewed from the City of New York, the panorama of flame, illuminating the darkness of the sky above, of the earth around, and dancing angrily on the rushing tide of the intervening sea, the panorama was one which, from the memories of those spectators who beheld it, the recollection of the spectacle was likely never to fade.

Across the East River, from the east side of the long tongue of land known as Manhattan Island, now overbuilt into the dense and busy City of New York, beyond some one or two miles,—as viewed from the more medium streets of New York, —of surging waters, the opposite shore of Long Island has become likewise overbuilt,

but overbuilt by the exigencies and ramifications of an industrial city; manufactories, railway depôts and the like, with the result that all along, down to the very water's edge, there has sprung up a fringe of wharves, piers, timber and coal yards, crowded with vast stacks of lumber, piles of coal, stacks of casks of inflammable oils.

And this mass had caught.

Viewed at midnight when at its height, from the west or New York side of the East River, the conflagration formed a spectacle of grandeur and magnificence indeed.

But it is our purpose to deal with spectacular effect and the setting of our drama only in so far as they may form the setting, and compose the immediate surroundings of those characters whose interests and actions have become interwoven into the network of the story which we have to tell.

Although he follows fashion, and assumes often a family history, and sometimes, in the

soaring ambition of his soul, will purchase for so many hundreds or thousands of dollars from some accommodating title-monger, a pedigree and a coat of arms, the latter blazoned in all the tinctures of heraldic art, affecting to prove his descent from some line of nobility, or even mediæval kings, yet for all this the average American citizen, the creation of the great wealth producing country of his adoption, is more commonly an essentially industrial being.

If day by day he is making the great country of his adoption, if day by day he is opening its inexhaustible mines, hewing its boundless forests, covering its vast areas and prairies with an almost incomprehensible network of iron roads : yet his great country too is all the while moulding and making him, and producing often —although toning down as its civilization matures,—a peculiar manner of man, shrewd, sensible, and practical withal, but who thinks much more of an active present, and a grander future, than he does of a defunct, an obsolete

and worn out and almost forgotten past, who boasts less frequently of his descent from a noble ancestry or mediæval kings, than he does of the number of millions of bushels of wheat which are exported, the number of millions of hogs that are annually slaughtered, the number of millions of gallons of oil that are annually raised, the numbers of manufactories, and the numbers of millions of dollars vested in public works, and bank shares in his own state.

But this is a digression, however it is a digression, bearing—though perhaps a little remotely—on the course of our tale.

Thus the long fringe of wharves, docks, and warehouses which come down to the water's edge on the shore of Long Island City are commonly filled and piled with merchandise of a most inflammable sort.

But we will return to the adventures of some of the characters who comprise the more active entities of our tale.

It is unnecessary to say what purpose led

Colonel Vander Meulen and his little ferret man Paul Neugass to be prowling about the eastern streets of New York City at an unconscionable hour of the night, at an hour when both the human and brute creation commonly rest from toil, when silence broods upon the sleeping city, and when the great wheels, and arms, and interests of the mighty machine of commerce for a time are still.

But so it happened that they were.

From the eastern extremity of Thirty-fourth Street New York which is terminated by the rapid current, as aforesaid, of the East River, or putting it shortly in familiar American parlance, from the foot of East 34th Street, New York, there ply periodically to an opposite landing stage known as Hunter's Point, a line of those —to foreign eyes—strange vessels called ferries, which emanate radially on all sides and to all points outside the great Island City.

Among a crowd of sightseers anxious for excitement, which thronged the midnight trip

of the vessel, stood the New York private detective Colonel Vander Meulen and Paul Neugass his little grey coated ferret man.

In due course of some twenty minutes, in which from the ferry boat, as it forged its way through the tide of the East River, there appeared a view of superlative grandeur of the raging and momentarily increasing fire,—the crowd of passengers landed at Hunter's Point, and of these the majority hurried off to the scene of activity and disaster.

With these were Colonel Vander Meulen, while the little man Paul Neugass, half walking, half running, shambled and scrambled along, keeping as near as he could to his master's heels or his master's side.

Why they were there, what good they could do, an outsider might have experienced some difficulty to define. But far apart as are the two characters as the very antipodes or the very poles, Colonel Vander Meulen, as where extremes meet, like that facile seedy creation

of grandiose gentility Mr. Wilkins' Micawber, was ever on the alert for something to his advantage to "turn up." But whereas Colonel Vander Meulen was prompt to seize and turn every thread and every shred of his chances to account, Mr. Micawber, we are told, allowed the magnificent opportunities of his life to glide—so narrow and defined, my dear reader, is the boundary line between the sensible and the simple, between the powerful and the weak.

When Vander Meulen and Paul Neugass arrived on the scene of the conflagrations, although, as we have stated before, in an exaggerated degree, the devouring element was moment by moment gaining with leaps and bounds of fearful rapidity, over the efforts of those who, with a frantic display of energy, were seeking to restrain to within the narrowest possible limits its devastating power.

The scene of a fire to many, to most of us is not new, but where civilization is but young, and where boundless forests produce building

materials of inflammable woods ready for the hewer's hand, and where the frame houses of youthful civilization grow into streets upon which it can feed, the outbreak of a conflagration is a catastrophe indeed—a catastrophe of which often no man can foresee the end, a catastrophe far greater than when civilization has outgrown its early youth from an age of wood to an age of brick and stone.

And this was what was taking place at Long Island City.

Having originated, as commonly, no one knew where, down near the water's edge among the densely packed wharves, it spread upwards to the frame and wooden habitations of the adjacent streets.

House after house caught, became wrapped, enfolded, surrounded by the consuming element of destruction, and by the intensity of the heat, and beyond all the power of human agency to quell, the annihilating demon of flame seemed as if in his cruel revelry verily to dissolve,

—if we may use the word,—each human dwelling into a mass of wreckage, of *débris*, and then as the crash of timbers followed, that which once was a human habitation, a home, became converted into a void and smoking space.

There was the constant arrival of engines upon the scene, there was the turmoil, there was the crashing of falling timbers, there was the rushing and shouting of excited men, and then suddenly out of all this confusion arose an incident which is affected by, or forms part of our tale.

The flames had enveloped in their devouring embrace a row of those frame or wood built dwellings so common in American villages or the older towns,—where wood is more easily obtainable than stone,—on to which, from the wharves, they had leaped and caught, and one after another the devoted dwellings seemed like as though they were composed of dry matchwood, to be enfolded, almost as if lovingly, in the destructive tongues and folds of flame, and

one by one, amid blinding showers of sparks, and dense volumes of stifling smoke, to come crashing to the ground.

The cries of the frightened women and children who were barely escaping with life,—some indeed not escaping at all,—the shouts of firemen, the roar of the wind-caught flames, the falling noise of demolished tenements and buildings, and timber, with the eager excitement of the crowd, was a scene of overthrow, confusion and disaster impossible adequately to depict in words.

In the midst of all this confusion, out upon the central balcony of a large frame house which stood some thirty to forty feet above the ground, in construction than its neighbours somewhat more pretentious and ornate but no less inflammable, there appeared wrapped in only the merest covering of apparel, a woman, terror-stricken, shrieking, gesticulating, praying in the midst of the surrounding ruin, for the salvation of dearest life.

The fire had already full possession of the lower apartments and floors of the inflammable structure, and thus through these all exit was hopelessly cut off; firemen and escapes engaged upon other and distant rescues were nowhere near, and it seemed to the noisy and excited beholders, whose sympathies were roused to the uttermost on the helpless creature's behalf, a matter only of moments, whether she could be saved or whether she must suffer the most painful of deaths.

Higher and higher could the flames be seen from without in the lower apartments to mount up, licking in, devouring their prey.

Then suddenly there was a shout and a cheer. The cry arose "she was saved!" "she was saved!" A ladder had been found and was placed against the balcony, and then with cat-like agility there pushed through the crowd and ran up round after round, to the utter astonishment and wonderment of our two acquaintances Colonel Vander Meulen and

his little ferret man Paul Neugass, who were spectators of the scene, no other than the New York detective's midnight visitor, none other, he believed, than either the ghost, or the double, or the counterpart,—he knew not which,—of the murdered Bertram Gonault.

The little man Paul Neugass, who was as quick to make the recognition as his chief, jumped, gesticulated, and capered madly by his master's side in the wildness of his joy—joy that the strange mystery which for so many days and so many nights he had laboriously sought to fathom and unravel seemed thus being revealed to them by this fortuitous and fortunate chance,—for ill as is the wind which blows, terrible indeed, the little man thought, must be the fire that burns for nobody's good.

But wild as was the little man's delight, and also,—if less vehemently expressed,—that of his chief, it was a hope and satisfaction which was as transient and short-lived as it was wild.

Scarcely had the Colonel's strange visitor gained the summit, scarcely were his arms stretched out to save the woman who stood in such imminent peril, and such abject fear,—scarcely had he grasped her in his arms, when, undermined as had been the stories of the large frame house beneath, burnt already merely to a charred frame, and weighted by the pressure on it of the ladder of the rescuer and simultaneously that of the two human beings, the whole fabric of the front gave way, crashing backwards in one stupendous crash, carrying with it the two hapless beings, apparently to certain death amid the wreckage and ruin of the devouring flames.

A loud exclamation of horror in one long deep wail arose from the throats of the eager and expectant crowd.

With leaps and bounds the flames again shot upwards and arose upon the pyre, over what seemed inevitably the ashes of the dead.

As the fabric of the frame house collapsed

and fell crashing into the flames, a loud wild heartrending shriek of fear, anguish, despair was heard above the din of the disaster, and then all was still, and where the house had stood the flames seemed to leap and revel over the demolition of—let us think not what—for the spectacle seemed to all who beheld it too sickening for contemplation and thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT "THE WORLD" TOLD.

WHEN, on the morning following the calamitous fire among the wharves, and warehouses, and dwellings of Long Island City, Colonel Vander Meulen, in pursuit of his peculiar calling, sought once again the vicinity of Battery Park, he became aware that the previous night's adventure and disaster and its results had brought about, with regard to himself and the English business which so fully occupied his daily and nightly thoughts, a certain shifting of the scenes.

We have written above the words "peculiar calling," and *certes*, a peculiar calling or profession, that, the unearthing and elucidation of the dark ways of mystery, of crime, in all its hydra-headed shapes and ramifications, which Colonel Vander Meulen and his brethren pursue—*certes*, a peculiar calling it is.

But that the unamericanized reader may be made more fully to comprehend the part which the cute Colonel has come to be playing in the working out of the tragic drama, the secret history of which is the purpose of this book, we will explain, that, although individuals practise the same calling of "shadowing" and investigating among the great masses of our own metropolis and other populous cities, the ferretting out of the secrets of lives both high and low, yet, in England, the profession of the private detective is one of those by-ways of life, which, through shame rather than through modesty, dislikes to raise its head, but rather skulks in the shadows of darkness and of night, and the followers of the craft hail from the seclusion of some private alley or court, and face the light of publicity in a shame-faced mood.

But on the American continent, and in the cosmopolitan city of New York, the profession occupies in the social hive a more recognised place, and the New York detective agency as

glaringly and openly flaunts its sign and its *raison d'être* before the world, as if that *raison d'être* were the providing of mankind with any of the daily needed luxuries or necessities of life. Nay perhaps so they do.

Neither too, as some may suppose, is our friend Colonel Vander Meulen an impossible, or indeed a very uncommon type, for, at the conclusion of the anti-slavery feuds, the American citizen who had readily and heartily, nay with burning enthusiasm, quitted the office or the warehouse for the camp and the carnage and the risks of battle, and had taken up the sword in defence of his espoused cause, had at the conclusion of the struggle as easily laid his weapons aside and resumed the arts of peace.

It is a specimen of this manner of American citizen, neither civilian or *militaire*, or perhaps it would be more correct to say a combination of both, that we have introduced for the carrying out of the incidents of this tale.

So when Colonel Vander Meulen calmly

reviewed the position, he recognised that circumstances were a little changed.

The strange unknown midnight visitor at his little office near Battery Park, of a week or two before, had told Vander Meulen if all other information failed he would meet him in a month's time to the hour at a secluded spot in Central Park, and now one thing was patent to Colonel Vander Meulen's mind. Neither he,—the Colonel,—nor the little ferret man Paul Neugass his tout, had a shadow of doubt but that the midnight visitor to their Battery Park den, and the man whom they had seen attempt such an act of conspicuous daring in his attempt to save the perishing woman's life, were identical, were one and the same man; and after the scene and catastrophe of the fire Colonel Vander Meulen felt quite sure, quite satisfied in his mind, that whatever might happen in some future world, neither the woman, who with the falling crash of the house and timbers into the midst of the roaring devouring element, nor the

man who with such a reckless disregard for his own life and safety had sought to rescue her, neither the one nor the other would he ever meet again in this.

Arriving at his Battery Park office in the midst of these reflections, Colonel Vander Meulen took up the early morning edition of the *New York World* unopened upon his desk, and still damp odorous and unpleasant with the smell of printer's ink, and there headed in the sensational style of American journalism, conspicuous in all the glories of boxwood, pica, and great primer, his eye fell upon the words:

"TREMENDOUS CONFLAGRATION AT LONG ISLAND CITY."

"TEN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS BURNED."

"MERVIL GARNIER EVEN DIES TO SAVE HIS LOVER."

"KATHLEEN VENNER PERISHES HORRIDLY IN THE FLAMES."

"EXCITING SCENES."

And then, in the same attempt at producing in the minds of his readers a heart-stirring blood-curdling effect, in that semi-florid, semi-sentimental tone which is the abasement of a great language, and the contempt and disgust of the true student of the pure well of English undefiled, the ubiquitous *World's* reporter, in the overabounding exuberance of his misguided verbosity, went on in the same mortification of style, yet with astonishing minuteness, and with those occasional gleams and grains of shrewd common sense which appear intermixed with such a redundance of wordy refuse, to tell the *World's* readers the story of the appalling scene.

Nor was this all, for half-way down the *World's* page the ingenious compiler of the report was able to insert, for the study and admiration of his numerous readers, one of those rough and ready but accurate pen-and-ink portraits of the man whom he reported was Mervil Garnier, and worked up into the hero

of his narrative, who in sentimental, romantic tone he asserted had when clasping his lover, whom he died to save, in his arms, had, with her, been burnt to a cinder in the fierce flames.

How or where the ubiquitous *World's* reporter could have procured such a striking likeness of the man Mervil Garnier, whom he gravely and positively asserted had been burnt to a cinder in the flames, it is not easy to surmise, but it was perhaps by the exercise of one of these feats of legerdemain,—which form one of the secrets of which the world at large knows little—of the reporter's trade—and which Colonel Vander Meulen felt he would very much like to know.

Be that as it may, when Colonel Vander Meulen, side by side, compared the ingenious *World* reporter's rough and ready pen-and-ink sketch of the face with the costly portrait, as in death, which he had received from his English correspondent Doctor Sirius Wells, there remained no doubt in the Colonel's mind,

that, whether living or dead, the portraits were portraits of one and the same man.

But whether the subject were living or whether he were dead, the whole mysterious surroundings had had the effect of fermenting the New York detective's interest to a pitch of fever heat in the prosecution of his "Case."

Not only too had there ignited in his breast a genuine interest, a determination if it were within the bounds of possibility, to sift to the bottom, for his own satisfaction, the mystery which enveloped and surrounded the whole affair of Bertram Gonault's life *or* death, but should he succeed, there hung at the end of his labours that tempting bait of the £5,000 money reward.

So without further ceremony, Colonel Vander Meulen sauntered round to one or two of the steam-ship offices, most of which are situated within a few minutes' stroll of his little den in Battery Park, made his selection of a berth, and then and there, producing a big roll of

greenbacks from his fob, paid his first-class passage, if we may so express it, to another world.

The following day the steamer was to sail, and on the morning of that day, laden with impedimenta consisting only of a small trunk and a valise, the redoubtable Colonel might have been seen rolling along in a West Street horse car towards one of the wharves, where was moored his home for the next ten or twelve days of his life.

Punctual to her appointed time the great steamer backed out from her moorings and slued round into the stream.

There was the usual kissing of hands, the usual little shower of tears, the usual flutter of dainty cambric handkerchiefs in the ocean air, and the usual adieux, and then, under a bright sunshine, and over a sparkling sea, the great steamer steamed away, and the next time that Colonel Vander Meulen set his foot on land it was in Liverpool Docks.

Without delay, like a man who has a definite purpose in view rather than as one who lingers to admire the scenery on the way, he drove through the great, busy Lancashire seaport town to Lime Street Station, and in about five hours was in the centre of English metropolitan life, and in a hansom cab careering through the largest and perhaps the busiest city of the world, till he found himself and his scanty luggage landed in the little court near Whitehall, which was the London den of his shrewd but homely *confrère* Doctor Sirius Wells.

The traveller mounted some stairs to the English *confrère's* sanctum, and, as he had been apprised by wire of the arrival of his American cousin, Doctor Sirius Wells was "at home."

Then there were the usual salutations (for they were not quite strangers), and soon these two *confrères* were absorbed in the discussion of the "Case." What comprised the "Case"

was of course the whole mystery which surrounded Bertram Gonault's death.

But like many keen shrewd hard-headed men Colonel Vander Meulen was a confirmed sceptic, not in religion,—for perhaps he had no religion except the worship of Mammon—but a confirmed sceptic in the daily affairs of the world, in the events that came before him in every-day life; he had seen enough of the under current of human motives and human actions, enough of cheats, and frauds, and hoaxes, and shams, to make him believe only what he saw clearly with his own eyes, and to disbelieve a very big fraction even of that.

He believed that the man whom he had seen hurled headlong amid a *débris* of crashing timbers, into the midst of the flames of the great fire at Long Island City was dead (nobody who saw the catastrophe could doubt or dispute the fact)—though he little thought how rudely soon even that belief was to be shattered,—he believed it because he had seen it with his own

eyes, but no assurances, no arguments that his *confrère* Doctor Sirius Wells could adduce, were sufficient to convince the unbelieving American detective Colonel Vander Meulen that the person whose death he was asked to investigate, until then, was in truth and verity actually and really dead.

Doctor Sirius Wells argued and talked, talked till he was tired, hoarse, provoked, and talked till he felt that he could have kicked the man whom he was endeavouring to convince,—which would have been a serious thing,—from the top to the bottom of his stairs, but the other, obdurate, unconvertable, unconvinced, said little in reply, but he quietly shook his head.

Then, shocking to relate, Doctor Sirius Wells expressed the vehemence of his dissent by the utterance of very improper words.

The American produced the copy of the *New York World*, and exhibited in support of his argument the rough and ready pen-and-

ink portrait of the man whom he asserted he had seen alive, who had visited him, and whom he now knew as Mervil Garnier, and had witnessed to meet an untimely and terrible end, while attempting an act of such bravery and daring, in the flames.

The perfect similarity between the *World* reporter's pen-and-ink portrait, and a likeness, which he himself had in his possession, of Bertram Gonault, even Doctor Sirius Wells himself could not dispute. In fact so strong was Colonel Vander Meulen's evidence, and his homely argument "that a man couldn't be dead while he was alive," that Doctor Sirius Wells, even almost doubting the evidence of his own senses, began to veer round to the opinion, that by some inexplicable twisting of circumstances, that instead of being really dead, Bertram Gonault had added only yet another freak to the many eccentricities and excesses, nay madnesses,—for many of his acts truly had been nothing better than madnesses,—of the later

years of his life, and while allowing himself to be reported as dead,—murdered brutally,—had, alive and in the flesh, satiated with European indulgences, and European dissipations, and soured by the wreck of his life's deepest and truest happiness in the disappointment of his love, had transported himself back again to the great free country whose travel is boundless, whose prairies are limitless, whose lakes are seas, and where wealth is even more honoured, and poverty more despised, and where the vast resources of a millionaire such as Bertram Gonault was, seemed to promise even greater pleasures, and greater means of increase and return, than they did in the pent-up island of his adoption, where as Colonel Vander Meulen put it cruelly and ironically, he might fear to go out on a foggy night in the dark for fear he would step over the edge of the little island into the sea.

"But did you actually see this man Gonault after he was dead?" asked the American.

To this Doctor Sirius Wells had to confess that he had not.

"Then," retorted the American, "my position is the stronger because I have seen him alive."

And so the two men parted, these two of the acutest intellects of London and New York, the two acutest in their profession agreed to differ and to part.

Not that they absolutely quarrelled although they came very close to not being friends. Their relations were what, perhaps for want of a better word, we call "strained," that is drawn out so far asunder, so attenuated, so fine that another pull on the bond of friendship, of feeling that united them, and the bond would altogether break.

Under the circumstances Colonel Vander Meulen considered perhaps the wisest course he could take was to leave his friend alone. So he very quietly took up his quarters at a small private hotel in the midst of London, in Craven

Street near Charing Cross, and waited patiently some futher development of events.

* * * *

When Colonel Vander Meulen arrived in London the English summer was on the wane.

It seems one of the mysteries of that fickle child which carries on its flirting wings the behests of civilization and fashion, that men and women, the sons and daughters of the wealthy and the great, whose resources permit them to wander hither and thither through the world at their own sweet wills, should choose to be stifled in the choking, almost vitiated atmospheres of hot and crowded rooms, and the desert wastes of the interminable streets of a great city, when far and wide over a beauteous land the songs and smiles and showers of vernal nature and of overabounding life, by coppice and hedgerow, by woodland cool, and meadow sweet, by the rolling river, by placid lake, and rattling stream, by land and sea and sky, and shore, the world of nature

invites them to enjoy, and sings unceasingly a heavenward song of praise.

But so it is, for the tyranny of fashion is it not a condition of inscrutable bondage to the wise?

When the American detective arrived in London the polite world was, for that year, just awakening to the conviction that from the follies of fashion it was time to quit its summer haunt, to throw aside the high silk hat (the crowning delusion of the period), and, in more rational garb to seek cooler shades.

The throngs in the London parks looked jaded and flagging and fagged, while the hot, stifling, blazing, suns of August converted Piccadilly and the Strand into somewhat of the aspect and temperature of arid waterless wastes, traversed by those travellers in life's journey who are condemned, by their devotion to a fickle goddess, to endure the penance of a prescribed number of uncomfortable days.

Among many of the wealthier and more independent who had left, or were quitting

town, were many of Mr. Lumley's aristocratic *clientèle*, and the important lawyer, finding that the calls and consultations of his clients were, through their increasing and conspicuous absence from town, daily becoming more rare, till the business of his office amounted to the insignificant farce of being almost nothing at all, had quitted the quiet street near Lincoln's Inn Fields for a select watering place, which it will be quite near enough for our purpose if we designate as Burlington-on-Sea.

Consequently on this a very desirable interview which would otherwise have taken place between the great London lawyer and the arch detective of New York was in an inconvenient way delayed and postponed.

During these arid London days, Colonel Vander Meulen, in a purposeless way, all the while chafing under the enforced interval of inaction and idleness—into which circumstances now and again perhaps force the busiest of us,—in a listless way, endured the thraldom

of London life. He smoked his ten-cent Havanas, or read the newspapers in the cooler shade but stuffy atmosphere of his little Craven Street hotel, or sat on a twopenny iron chair and viewed fashion and folly personified in the Park. He had few or no intimates in London but Doctor Sirius Wells, and him he allowed to follow his own opinions—for he felt that further intercommunication between him and his now almost antagonist, would come dangerously and unpleasantly near to bringing about a breach of the peace.

And this he did not desire.

But while Colonel Vander Meulen was thus peacefully becalmed, resting on the placid sea of life, there happened to him what I can only best compare to one of those meteoric bolts which come out of a sky of unclouded calm and blue.

Truly it was a little thing, but little things often indicate great events, the direction of the little leaflet as it whirls from its topmost parent

twig may foretell the coming of an angry mighty blast.

And the little thing which came to Colonel Vander Meulen, as day by day he tried, by trifling distractions to get rid of his time, was a leaflet—not a withered item of foliage from a tree such as we have given as an illustration above,—but it was a leaflet which proved (that is as Colonel Vander Meulen now thought, if anything ever proved anything at all, which certainly now he did not believe that it did, or that there was any such a thing as proof, or any such words as proof in the dictionary of the wise), an extraordinary, an astonishing thing.

And the way it came about was this :—

Colonel Vander Meulen, on leaving New York, had left instructions with those who, during his absence attended to his affairs, to send to him any communications addressed to his business quarters in the Empire City.

It was, among a batch of such communications, that an envelope directed in a shaky,

scrawly, scarcely decipherable caligraphy, came into his hand.

It was addressed to him at his Battery Park den, and had come in the usual way, by United States Mail, through the Post Office in New York.

The detective broke the seal.

On a piece of a leaf torn from a pocket or memorandum book, written upon, evidently by the same shaky hand, in characters traced in lines as uncertain and ill-defined as an insect would have left behind if it had crawled intelligently over the paper with inky feet, Colonel Vander Meulen managed with some difficulty to read the following :—

"*You will not have forgotten the time at which I told you that we might meet, and I would tell you something to your advantage, at a certain spot, at a certain hour, just one month from our last meeting, in Central Park.*

"*Now that I cannot keep that appointment I will await you at the same spot, and at the*

same time, of one hour to midnight in two months from our interview instead of one."

That was all it said. The scrawly epistle bore no signature, no address, no date, but only those few lines traced in the big, scrawly, dragging writing, comparable to nothing so much, as we said, as to an insect crawling over the paper with inky feet.

CHAPTER IX.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES.

As the Colonel in the privacy of his room in the little Craven Street Hotel, his face blanched livid, and the trifle of paper, on which the,—to him,—surprising and strange epistle was scrawled, twirled and fluttered from his trembling loosened grasp, twirled across the room in the cool light summer morning breeze which came in at the open window, and then what seemed to him as like a billet from the grave, from the hand of the dying or the dead, the flimsy messenger lighted on the floor.

Colonel Vander Meulen became absorbed in thought.

Then his midnight visitant, who had appeared to him, and disappeared so mysteriously

in his little, now far off den at Battery Park, that Mervil Garnier, Bertram Gonault or whoever on earth he might be, was still not dead, was yet an active entity of life.

The detective stooped down and picked up the flimsy missive from the floor, he examined it closely, and did that which those sharp clever people do who wish to know more than their correspondents intend to tell, and is a faculty, which when the correspondent is equally clever and sharp, he knows well how to turn to his own account.

Colonel Vander Meulen read between the lines. That is, he conjectured from what was left unsaid, a great deal more than the mysterious writer knew that he was telling; and perhaps, from that flimsy half-leaf torn from the memorandum or pocket book, Colonel Vander Meulen, reading between the lines, learnt as much as if his correspondent had covered a half-sheet of foolscap with words.

Adding the *World* reporter's graphic news-

paper account of the fire at Long Island City, and what he himself had seen at the fire, to the fact of the missive which he held in his hand, and putting the two and two together, and still reading between the lines, Colonel Vander Meulen came to the conclusion that, notwithstanding the New York *World's* sensational and highly coloured narrative, notwithstanding what both he,—the Colonel,—and his little grey-coated assistant Paul Neugass had both witnessed, yet by some miracle of chance the man, who for want of any greater certainty as to his true identity we must call Mervil Garnier, had somehow, by some marvel of mysteries, escaped at least with his life.

How he could have thus escaped, would have seemed a miracle to those who, as he fell among the rushing devouring elements, amid the crashing falling timbers, saw his apparent and horrid fate.

But instances of hairbreadth escape are not

wanting throughout the whole range of fiction, and travel, and adventure, and indeed in sober, ordinary everyday life and fact, and this might be—probably was—only one other added to the startling list of such as these.

That was what Colonel Vander Meulen conjectured and thought.

Then he went on to read between the lines.

Having much yet to tell, we must refrain from finding space in these chapters to repeat everything that, by this process of reading between the lines, Colonel Vander Meulen came to know.

But the scrawly handwriting, the postponement of the appointed meeting, what he himself had seen, all these facts put together led him to feel mentally convinced, that, somewhere in or near New York, the man Mervil Garnier, whoever he might be, lay perhaps nursed by strangers, probably suffering from serious bodily injuries, but from which he believed he would recover, probably even now writhing in

agony, scarce able to move to and fro the hand which had scrawled those characters, and peradventure swaying betwixt life and death.

Although the little missive, which must in some way have got into and come through the New York post office, thence to the detective's Battery Park den, then across three thousand miles of ocean and three hundred miles of land, to the little Craven Street Hotel said not a word of all this, yet, just as the keen and practised eye of the Indian on the war trail reads the footprints upon the sand, the marks on the bushes and grass, likewise almost as plainly as if the disabled writer had written it, as surely as if in words he had been told it, that was what Colonel Vander Meulen read.

As he thought it over, the whole surroundings,—the setting as we may call it of the case, —seemed to his sharp experienced eyes, and acute intelligence, as clear as day, for in some inexplicable way, American life or the American climate or atmosphere is a wondrous

sharpener, a wondrous quickener of intelligence and thought.

The day wore on in which the American had received from New York this little epistle, which afforded him such a very valuable and startling page of information, in so very few words. And as during his wanderings and explorations about the London streets, adding what he could to his fund of knowledge of our great overgrown city, marvelling—as most foreigners who see it with intelligent eyes do, and as every native must—at its greatnesses and its littlenesses, at the wondrous variety of its wonders side by side with the petty commonplacenesses of its every-day life.

As the day wore on and he revolved the newly known circumstances in his mind, they seemed to him to add but little or nothing, to give him indeed no great reason for any change in his course.

As to wondering, he had ceased to wonder, had ceased to wonder at the inexplicable de-

velopment of the complex but important and interesting case which had come into his hands, for it seemed to him like the acting of a chapter of fiction, or some wild romance.

Whatever might now occur in connection with the Vernwood tragedy would probably have caused him but small or no surprise. He had arrived at a stage beyond surprise. Had the whole phalanx in all their generations of those dead-and-gone Gonaults appeared to him in ghostly shape, all those men of the bygone past whose iron and steel clad effigies, with their tall banneretted lances stood now so grimly and silently around the great Vernwood hall, while their bodies rotted or their bones decayed in the dank damp mausoleum, and their souls sang jubilees in heaven or writhed in agony elsewhere, had they now all passed before him in their grim array it is likely that the hardened New York detective and grand-army man of the United States would have sat down and calmly, unastonished, and un-

moved, have surveyed the whole ghostly company through the fragrant upward circling fumes of his twenty-cent weed. We write this of course only figuratively, but to such a degree had now grown to be the incredulous unbelieving tenor, concerning the Vernwood mystery, of this man's mind and thoughts.

Nothing, no circumstance that could arise, would have caused him much, if any, surprise in connection with this strange, and even to his experienced mind, this inexplicable case.

The day wore through, and Colonel Vander Meulen had in some way even to go so far as to tax his ingenuity to get rid of his time. He chafed and fumed to himself at the vexatious loss of valuable hours and days, because there was no other person but himself to whom he could chafe and fume.

Mr. Lumley, whom he should have interviewed promptly on reaching London, was away from town,—he didn't know exactly where, —beyond his reach ; for like many busy men,

Mr. Lumley, when he chose to emancipate himself from the cares and toils of his profession, left no very definite trace or information as to his probable whereabouts behind, for he always argued quite rightly, that if the retirement of his brief, well-earned vacations, was to be broken in upon by the intrusions and questions of his office every other hour of the twelve, he had better remain in town and not attempt to take any respite of the nature of a holiday at all.

Besides, the New York detective had crossed the ocean without any solicitation from his London correspondent, on his own responsibility, for his own satisfaction, and at his own risk, and at his own cost.

Nobody had asked him to come, he was in England neither at the invitation or instigation of Mr. Lumley or of Doctor Sirius Wells, so, if he was losing valuable time he had himself only to thank for the loss.

But Colonel Vander Meulen was a man

whose natural sagacity led him into very very few mistakes, he was as wary as a giraffe, as keen-eyed as a lynx or a hawk, and if he had not felt sure that in one way or another his visit to London would turn out a profitable investment of time and money and bodily wear and tear, he would most probably have remained in New York.

When he booked from New York to London he did it with his usually wide open eyes. And now here he was in London; and in London, till there came some turn of the tide, he must exist and subsist and resolved to remain.

And thus it was, that as morning turned into afternoon, and as afternoon waned into evening, and evening shadowed into night, and London began to awake into those dissipations which shun the light of day, under the glare and brilliancy of the gaslight, Colonel Vander Meulen found himself in the somewhat lively vicinity of Leicester Square, for the denizens of this part of London become most wide-awake

as the steady-going inhabitants of the suburbs and shires think it advisable to retire to sleep.

Before his eyes, a large theatrical establishment was just about opening its doors, and its broad façade was brilliantly aglow with attractive illuminated designs, while an imposing array of placarded pictures of dancing beauties, entrancing ballets, convulsing oddities, and astonishing wonders, had the desired effect of luring the very necessary and moderate entrance fee from the usually unimpressionable detective's pocket, and Colonel Vander Meulen found himself within its doors.

Certainly the combined spectacular effect which the entertainment produced, of so much colour, and so much tinsel, and so much light, so much beauty, so much muscular agility, so much enravishing music upon and about the stage, and so much allurement among those who were supposed to be there with the purpose of looking on, that the New Yorker thought that he had never seen equalled, and

he was sure he had never seen excelled, not even in that "hub" of the universe New York, and Colonel Vander Meulen felt that he had something yet to learn.

Then suddenly there entered into Colonel Vander Meulen's heart to conceive how it was all done; and by means of the expenditure of a little more of his wealth, of persuasion, of cajolery, he passed that jealously guarded portal which separates the professional world from the common, and behind the scenes, stood among such a marvellous crowd of men and women, young, middle-aged and old, as only the requirements of a large theatrical establishment can collect from the masses of ordinary humanity which crowd the great metropolis, and re-mould, re-dress, and reproduce them into the semblance of kings, or queens, or warriors, or fairies, or gnomes, and every character and creature under heaven, which human eyes ever saw, or human imagination ever conceived.

It was among this crowd, among this wonderful *mélange* of characters that Colonel Vander Meulen stood.

It is beyond the modest power of the writer of these pages, by means of mere words to paint even in faint colours, the mixture of character—mixture of character in every way —which Colonel Vander Meulen beheld about him, it added a page to his experience and a chapter to his life. And yet all was humanity, intensity of humanity and that surely not in its most exalted state.

A certain poet has told us that "All the world's a stage," and when we see actors and actresses posturing, bowing, walking, talking, in grandiloquently shapely periods in their parts, we must not forget that they too like us are only men and woman, weighted with all the woes and realities, the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears of an inner life,—strip off the semblance of the king and there remains the man.

And when we come too near we cannot but discover too much for our own pleasure, of the paint, the spangles, the tinsel, and the gloss, that much, very much, of this is outward show, unreal, assumed.

Around Colonel Vander Meulen were men in mimic armour, but they were men, walking, working, drinking, toiling men; there were mimic kings in all the faded glories of their sham estate, but these kings were the merest men, perhaps merely society's dregs; there were mimic queens and fairies, but they were human only, with all the frailties, and longings, and attributes of their sex; there was too the mimic semblance of beings which people only the myth-historic and imaginary realms of fable, fiction or romance; creatures of mere fancy, denizens of worlds which no human eye — except the eye of phantasy — has ever seen.

It was between the acts, the curtain was drawn when the American stood in the midst

of this wondrous and motley assemblage which moved and surged in hundreds round him, each engaged, as on the active business of life; men, women, boys, girls, and children of every age and either sex attired, or semi-attired, in all the extravagance and oddities which appertain to opera-comique or burlesque.

Then suddenly, out of this wondrous throng, there started up again before the astonished Vander Meulen, in the midst of the crowd, like some apparition from the dead, what seemed to be the troubling apparition of a haunted life, for there again, in the flesh or in the spirit, he was afraid to determine whether corporeal or only in ghostly guise, there stood before him that same Mervil Garnier or whoever or whatever he might be, again, his midnight visitor of New York, no other than the same whom he was asked to believe was murdered in England, burnt according to the New York *World's* report to a cinder at the great fire in Long Island City, and from

whom that very morning he believed he had received a missive written in New York.

We have said before this that Colonel Vander Meulen's condition of mind was a condition beyond the influence of surprise, and now was added still another stretch to the strain of incredulity with which he was possessed.

Although in different, and in some kind of theatrical guise, there stood before him the same tall form, there appeared the same face with the right cheek indelibly scarred, there was when he laughed the same sardonic, Mephistophelian laugh—Colonel Vander Meulen felt he could have pointed him out, identified him for the most exacting requirements of justice, recognised him out of a thousand men.

There must be a truth, as there is truth in everything, no matter how apparently impenetrable is the veil of mystery and disguise, but what that truth was it was beyond the experience or power of the New York detective Colonel Vander Meulen to divine.

Was he being made the victim of some gigantic hoax? or was the case the most remarkable, the most inexplicable of his life?

If it cost him years of toil, years of thought, Vander Meulen swore inwardly to himself he would know. He would probe to its depths the tantalizing enigma by which he almost began to believe himself hoodwinked and befooled.

CHAPTER X.

"CAPTAIN WEST."

CHICKETTS and Mrs. Chicketts were what we will call a lower middle class, London, married, disunited pair.

So ambiguous and uncertain was the social position and status of the male fraction,—for he was something smaller and more insignificant in the opinion of his spouse than the worst half,—of this inharmonious twain, that he had never arisen to a higher distinction than the appellation of "Chicketts,"—plain and simple "Chicketts,"—in the wifely eyes or on the wifely tongue.

Chicketts' ancestral pride consisted in the glorious recollection and distinction that his

immediate forbear had been actively engaged in supplying bovine fluid to the human race—and unto his son and heir—the sole and same and only Chicketts with whom these pages are at all concerned,—descended the paternal honours of his race. In other words the father of Chicketts had been a London milkman, and previous to the happy,—or unhappy,—day of his union with the present and reigning Mrs. Chicketts, who was now the ruling factor of his downtrodden life, Chicketts secundus, or Chicketts junior had been the same.

Mrs. Chicketts' relations being indefinitely stated to be "something in the City," the great gulf which ran between the house of Chicketts, dividing it sharply and widely asunder, was an entity, a reality in which, in a good round forcible London English, poor Chicketts the present, heard very much more than was consistent with mental peace.

As, at the rent "Chicketts" and Mrs. Chicketts were willing or able to pay, no Lon-

don landlord had been found who was inclined to let a house large enough, or wide enough, to contain in peace and harmony this jarring twain, they in a way had their establishments apart.

Right away in that Metropolitan district between what is known as Maida Vale, Edgware Road, between that and St. John's Wood there exists a type of domiciliary edifice of which the examples are as plenteous as buds in spring.

There is usually a basement or kitchen beneath the ground level, above which there is what is called a dining room, frequently a stuffy and not uncommonly dirty room, lighted by a common inornate window with plain, common, inornate squares of glass, while above this, up a flight of stairs, the pride of the household called the drawing room is a more or less dingy apartment, before the window of which is built a balcony of ornamental iron work from which the favoured occupant or tenant of his favoured chamber may on summer evenings

enjoy a striking view of adjacent chimneys and walls.

He can also obtain an admirable view of his opposite neighbour's front windows and doors.

Between this building and the street an oblong rectangular enclosure surrounded by a high wall is called the garden, but is commonly as much unlike a garden, and is usually as bare of vegetable life as the site of Memphis or the Sahara desert, only at night from this Sahara waste arise the shrill clarion sounds of defeat and victory, for it is the seat and battle-field of feline war.

Without entering more minutely into details, it was in such a domicile as this that Mrs. Chicketts reigned.

Around the street corner from this favoured habitation was Chicketts' smaller demesne, and certainly in Chicketts' demesne there was more of the garden,—much more,—than was ever seen in Mrs. Chicketts' more imposing domain.

From the great financing millionaire whose

ventures and combinations in the commercial world are too often nothing worse or nothing better, nothing less or nothing more than gigantic frauds on the too confiding credulity of the public, and devourment of the smaller fry which sail in the commercial sea, down to the honest boy in rags and tatters who stands at the street corner and sells an honest boot-lace for an honest penny, it is astonishing how many are the degrees and gradations of what is called "commerce" or "business" or "trade."

Round the corner from Mrs. Chicketts' mansion which stood boldly and prominently facing the main road—round the corner in a small front room "Chicketts" stood.

It was a dirty little den filled with potatoes in baskets and sacks, sticks of celery in bundles, lettuces, milk, eggs, and ginger beer, and at certain intervals by way of tempting variety, Chicketts added cheap beef sausages, faggots, and saveloys. And it was the disposal of these

various comestible dainties and oddments which comprised Chicketts' idea of "business" and "trade."

How Mrs. Chicketts, whose connections were "something in the City," ever came to be deluded into uniting her destinies to a milkman, the aspirations of whose soul never soared above bundles of celery, cheap beef sausages, and saveloys, was one of the indissoluble enigmas of her blighted life.

But to make up for this Mrs. Chicketts had gone to a neighbouring news-vendor's and stationer's and selected a card stamped in relief with a floral design in the midst of which the word "Apartments" was printed in conspicuous characters, and this card the lady of the house had conspicuously displayed in the balconied window of her first floor front room.

We are quite aware that the letter or letteress of apartments is a character hackneyed in fiction and worn in fact, a character as denuded of its pristine gloss and freshness as is

the worn and shiny "black satin" in which from time immemorial fictionists have described her to flaunt, which usually like herself has outlived the splendours of its palmier days.

In short that of Mrs. Chicketts being a character observable in almost every London street is one on which it is quite unnecessary for us to dwell.

But at last as if to interrupt the vapid monotony of her existence there came a bright red-letter day in Mrs. Chicketts' life.

A stranger presented himself at Mrs. Chicketts' front door, desired to be shown the "apartment" in the window of which the card aforesaid was displayed, and then and there, without any chaffering or demur, agreed to pay Mrs. Chicketts' price and become tenant of Mrs. Chicketts' first floor front room.

The stranger, who gave his name as Captain West, but who in fact was no other than our acquaintance Colonel Vander Meulen of New York, paid a week's rent down, and signified

his desire to enter on his tenancy that very same afternoon.

In due time Mrs. Chicketts' new lodger arrived in a cab followed by another cab conveying an imposing load of boxes and trunks, most of which were mere empty dummies filled with rubbish to give them weight, for as we have already noticed, the Colonel's travelling equipment was a most meagre quantity.

But as to the exterior person of Mrs. Chicketts' new lodger, from the individual whom we know as Colonel Vander Meulen, it was marvellously and wondrously transformed, so wondrously that neither you or I my reader, however his American speech might have betrayed him to quick and practised ears, would for one moment have recognised the New York Keinrich Vander Meulen in the guise of the English Captain West.

But perhaps it was the well dressed exterior of this imposing personality that impressed and so affected Mrs. Chicketts' mind.

You might have taken Captain West for a British peer, you might have taken him for a member of the Imperial Parliament, you might have taken him for an ultra beau, you might have taken him for some first-water swell, but there was one thing you would never have taken him for, you would never have taken him for just what he was, you would never have suspected "Captain West,"—neither did Mrs. Chicketts, — to be Colonel Vander Meulen, private detective of New York.

Within three hours of the arrival of the new guest, Mrs. Chicketts had flown round with the burning words of gossip upon her tongue, and all her friends had heard of Mrs. Chicketts' wonderful new guest.

That the new lodger had just arrived in England she knew, for he said so, and he came from near the "Parliament Houses." He was a "perfect gentleman" Mrs. Chicketts said, somehow connected with the Government she thought. Indeed she didn't know that he

mightn't be something to do with Royalty itself.

That was the exultingly highly coloured account Mrs. Chicketts gave her gossipping connection of her new lodger Captain West.

As to poor Chicketts, he in the meantime, had sunk in her eyes to the level of the veriest worm.

Having told our reader *en passant* what Mrs. Chicketts thought of her new lodger, we will take a cursory look at Captain West himself in his new home on our own account, and leave out of the question Mrs. Chicketts' high flown, overglowing and overpainted ideas.

In the craftiness of her heart and the worldly wisdom of her profession,—and alas that we might add it,—too often of her sex, Mrs. Chicketts had asked her applicant about one third more money for the weekly rental for the dingy musty worn front room than she could quite well have taken, thus leaving a margin for the expected come down.

But the applicant required various "extras" here, and others there, which ran the rent up considerably above what Mrs. Chicketts had asked, and even then, as compared to what the New York detective had been paying for the simple privilege of having a roof over his head and a floor under his feet in his own city, he thought he was housed on quite moderate terms.

But what Mrs. Chicketts did not know, was that if she had asked double what she did for the privilege of entering her front door it would have been cheerfully paid.

But as for Colonel Vander Meulen, *alias*,—and as we will for the present call him,—Captain West—although the same heart beat within the same frame, and the same acute brain worked under the same crown, the outward man was metamorphosed to an amusing and surprising degree.

A head of iron grey hair, well brushed and fashionably curled, betokened an intimate and

very frequent acquaintance with the *perruquier's* art, while round about the lower part of his visage, all, or most of the growth which nature had implanted there, had disappeared, and in its place, with a rapidity which would have put all the advertised hair restoring marvels of commerce to the blush, in the same short space of one day, there had sprung a growth upon his upper lip which would have done credit to the application of cosmetiques and the cultivation of years.

By some apparently phenomenal and rapid physical change in his constitution the pale sallow face of the New Yorker had suddenly assumed, as if rejuvenated by the draught of some wondrous elixir, a ruddy and healthful glow.

Then, whereas, the sight of Colonel Vander Meulen of New York was not only good, but his enemies thought a deal too sharp for their benefit, Captain West found it necessary to keep dangling round his neck by a tiny fine

gold chain, or now and again perching upon his nose, a double eyeglass mounted and rimmed in a massive setting of gold.

In exchange for the eminently quiet and unpretending style of Colonel Vander Meulen's dress, Captain West appeared usually in a frock coat of a conspicuous mixture of light colours, while his understandings were covered with cloth of a marvellous plaid, in the selection of which good taste never certainly had been allowed to put in a word.

To this was added a gaudy necktie, gaiters of spotless white peeping down over his patent leather boots, while this whole magnificent person was ornamented with a profuse wealth of gaudy and costly jewels.

Mrs. Chicketts mounted apology upon apology for the inadequacy of her accommodation to the requirements of such a "perfect gentleman" as Captain West appeared to be, and at the dingy atmosphere of her room, but then, as Mrs. Chicketts said, they were mostly

old family things. Doubtless they were old—prematurely aged by Mrs. Chicketts' preference for the exercise of her tongue to the labour of her hands.

As one day after another wore on Captain West's principal occupation seemed, as far as Mrs. Chicketts could ascertain, writing in his room, for he seldom left it during the day.

But had Mrs. Chicketts been more intimate with the private life of her new lodger, if only indeed as intimate as we are, she would have discovered that Captain West's almost constant employment was the careful study, through the medium of a powerful pair of binocular field or opera glasses, apparently of some individual who occupied a house in full view of the Captain's window.

In the close observation of this individual, whoever he might be, Captain West seemed as alert, as eager, as deeply and intensely interested, as a cat or a leopard would have been in watching its prey, or as an enthusiastic star-

gazer would have been when on the look-out for some expected comet, or some lost and errant star.

After several days of intent observation Captain West had grown familiar with all the movements and habits of,—if we may so express it,—the daily existence of the lost or wandering star. But what seemed to Captain West a remarkable thing was that "the star" never ventured out except at night. It is quite true, as we all know, that stars do commonly appear only at night, but then what we are likening to a star here was a human being, and the human being only ventured out of doors at night.

But still by close observation and study through his binoculars, apart from what he saw at night Captain West became wonderfully familiar with even the internal domestic life,—if domestic life the living of one man alone in one or two rooms be worthy to be called,—of his man by day.

But like the bats and the owls this mysterious individual seemed almost entirely nocturnal in the habits of his life.

Nightly, no sooner did darkness set in than he sallied forth. And then Captain West sallied forth too.

He usually "shadowed" his mysterious game into a labyrinth of courts and streets,—which metropolitan improvements have since wiped away,—in the vicinity of Leicester Square, and then all shadow or trace for the time being was usually lost.

Another time, after this, and after having missed the scent and sight of his quarry, Captain West succeeded in making his way again behind the scenes of the great theatre in Leicester Square, and there in the midst of that strangely motley and miscellaneous assembly, human brute and supernatural, but still all human, would he see the same face, the same form that he believed was no other than either, still living, Bertram Gonault of Vern-

wood, or the mysterious Mervil Garnier whom only seven days before, he had believed to be living, or pending even 'twixt death and life, in New York.

Strange as it was, impenetrable as seemed the mystery of that life, the New York detective had no thought that, even if others were deceiving him, he was labouring under any delusion, or that by himself he was being deceived.

No; Colonel Vander Meulen had too much confidence in his own intelligence for that. The sight of Mervil Garnier, Bertram Gonault, or whoever he might be, in New York and again in London, seen with his own eyes, assured him, as no words of Doctor Sirius Wells or any one else could have assured him, that far from being murdered this man was still in life.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GRAVE: BUT WHERE'S THE DEAD?

WHEN the echoes of all these strange circumstances reached—as they did—Mr. Lumley's ears, as he vegetated in the enjoyment of his late summer holiday at the select watering place of Burlington-on-Sea, it induced him to cut short his period of quietude and repose, and the exemptions and relaxations from the calls of his profession, and the consultations over the broad acres and narrow legal details and other interests, of his aristocratic *clientèle*, and against his will, and not to the mollification of his temper, to return to the heated summer atmosphere of town.

Of course when all the reports came to him through Doctor Sirius Wells, from the latter's

transatlantic cousin and *confrère* Colonel Vander Meulen, that Bertram Gonault, instead of being dead and buried in England or Wales, was, in the firm conviction of the American detective, a living and active existence in New York, of course the great conveyancing lawyer superciliously and loftily pooh-poohed and phaw-phawed a great deal of the superfluous breath out of his important and portly body, and as to the idea of Bertram Gonault being among the smaller minority of the living, instead of having been unceremoniously sent over to the great majority of the dead,—he laughed the very idea to scorn. Of course he did.

But when, a few days afterwards Colonel Vander Meulen had moved his London quarters from the uncomfortably close atmosphere of Craven Street Charing Cross to the somewhat fresher and cooler vicinity between St. John's Wood and the Edgware Road, and the lawyer had arrived in town, Vander Meulen not only introduced himself and interviewed

the great conveyancer for the first time at Mr. Lumley's office near Lincoln's Inn Fields, and expressed to him his firm conviction, founded on his own ocular testimony, that Bertram Gonault whose foul murder he was asked to investigate professionally, was not only alive, and by himself had been seen and spoken to in New York, but was now alive and probably pretty well, and at that very moment under the close and unremitting espionage of himself or his agents in London, Mr. Lumley had no more doubt left in him but that this "New Yorker," "Dutchman," "Knickerbocker," or whatever he was,—thus the lawyer contemptuously spoke of him,—whom Doctor Sirius Wells had brought into the investigation of the Vernwood tragedy, was no more nor less than a hopeless monomaniac,—mad, rank mad,—and there very nearly happened at Mr. Lumley's that which very nearly happened on the top floor landing at Doctor Sirius Wells', namely—for giving sensible Englishmen credit for being

such fools, Colonel Vander Meulen came very near to being kicked down stairs.

But Mr. Lumley's professional etiquette restrained him from this violence, as he would have said "absolutely," and in due time Mr. Lumley learnt that he had reckoned without quite knowing his host.

Mr. Lumley was an Englishman and a gentleman—whatever that word may mean—a gentleman bred, reared, educated, and taught, not in the rough and ready ways of American life, where men in everything go the nearest way to work, but among the higher grades of English social and patrician society; and he did not quite recognise that there was fully as much 'cute sense in the head of the practised detective of New York as there was in all his own formal legal long-winded phraseology, couched in all the verbal pomposity of quires and reams of foolscap and brief.

No—in due time Colonel Vander Meulen quite satisfied Mr. Lumley that he was not a

monomaniac,—that his head was screwed on quite as it should be, that he was very far from being mad.

But however much he might despise the American in his heart, the lawyer had too much professional caution not to do all that in him lay to soothe the troubled waters, and smooth the passage between this Vander Meulen and Doctor Sirius Wells.

Therefore, however frigid its atmosphere, Mr. Lumley stepped into the gulf of cool waters which divided the two men asunder, and however much the volcanoes and slumbering subterraneous fires of difference or jealousy might be smouldering underneath, Mr. Lumley succeeded in veneering and varnishing over the breach, so that between the two there came to be no volcanic eruption, no open declaration of war.

Mr. Lumley although a good lawyer was a confirmed Conservative, a British Tory of the old and a biassed section of the old British

Tory school. That it should be so was inevitable almost, from the connections of his profession, for his connections were almost exclusively of that class among which the future is less a dream than the glorious historic past.

If he was not absolutely of patrician birth, there mingled in the blood which coursed through his veins very much of patrician pride. In the wisdom of his own conceit Mr. Lumley felt confident and secure. That he should be outwitted, outfooled, outdone, by a Yankee was a thing in the which he had no belief.

One thing Mr. Lumley when he came back to town strenuously vowed, it shouldn't take him many days to convert this American importation into the case. If his ocular testimony could convince him that Bertram Gonault was alive, perhaps the same ocular testimony would convince him that he was dead, verily he would show this man how absurdly he was in the wrong.

* * * * *

And now leaving the New York detective in the enjoyment of his own opinion and theory, and Mr. Lumley chuckling to himself that he would put this theory to the test, we will again shift the scenes.

At Vernwood, up among the tall beech trees on the hill-top, where they waved their gaunt lean heads in the breezes, and where the yew trees lent their shadows, where a long unbroken silence seemed to reign, and where the snow-drops and the daffodils reared their modest lowly heads, and the avenues of cypress seemed, like sombre sentinels, to stand by the portals of the dead, and the sear brown leaves lay scattered on the ground, here stood in solemn solitude and silence the mausoleum set apart for the interment and resting-place of the bodies of those men who from generation to generation bore, the—there at least—honoured name of Gonault.

Here, in the centre of a circular enclosure, surrounded by a tall paling of massive iron

work, in what is termed a ring fence,—a perfect circle in form,—stood a temple or fane of free-stone surmounted by a plain dome, which had generations before,—like as indeed had the whole burying place,—been erected at the cost and direction of some one—who at least had a thought for a future home,—some long dead-and-gone Gonault.

Thus, between the fane which stood in its centre, and the enclosed circle of land was, on every side of the former, a broad level space of turfed and consecrated ground,—the *campo-santo* of Vernwood, where might rest, let us hope in peace, the bodies and bones of the honoured of their race.

But this *campo santo*, this space of holy earth, although many bodies might have been laid therein, was nearly or quite devoid of graves.

Beneath the ground level of the chapel however,—and accessible only by an entrance down a flight of steps in its rear,—was an extensive underground vaulted hall or chamber, and

here, in numerous niches in the sides of the spacious chamber, some empty, some tenanted, or enclosed in marble sarcophagi, the sculpture on which was more or less inartistic or more or less ornate, here were deposited the coffins and remains of many generations, of various sizes and ages, and of both sexes of the dead.

Such was the resting-place which one of his family, many of whose descendants rested within those dark silent walls, had thought well to erect for the tenancy of the successive generations of his race.

But, perhaps by the unwillingness of any one of the succeeding masters of Vernwood, either to disturb the resting dead, or perchance to be himself reminded too forcibly of his own ultimate fate, the whole place, its surroundings and vicinity, had fallen into a condition of pitiable neglect, dilapidation, and decay.

In the *campo santo* or graveyard surrounding the chapel, the grass untended, grew rank and wild and high, while in the edifice of the

mausoleum itself, on every side, great blocks of freestone were becoming loosened and detached by the great fissures in the building, and by reason of frost and neglect were fallen or falling from the external walls, while inside the mortuary chapel itself, and still more in the vaulted chamber in which the dead lay underneath, the hand of time and years of neglect, had played havoc with this now doubly desolated resting place of the dead.

Unhealthy vapours arose to pollute the air, in great drops the damp trickled down the moss-grown internal walls, while the bat and the owl, the toad and the slow-worm, hung upon the rafters, or nightly hooted weird unearthly music, or crawled, or writhed, or wriggled upon the slimy slippery and loathsome floor.

A place it was neither endurable to the living or wholesome even for the dead,—and generation after generation had been permitted to run more completely to rack and ruin and decay.

Even Bertram Gonault during his reign, when money was as plenteous as the blocks of ore and spar which he excavated from his mines which he had opened in those bleak barren-looking Vernwood hills, even Bertram Gonault, who reformed and repaired everything else on which he could find an outlet for the lavishment of his easily gotten gold, even he had given the place a wide berth, or perhaps with an attack of that procrastination which had been so fatal, had put it off to another and another and a more convenient and indefinite day.

And so this was its condition, when, after the last owner of Vernwood's death, Mr. Lumley inspected this horrid unhealthy catacomb with the view of finding a meet resting place for poor Bertram's remains.

But Mr. Lumley perceived at once, that this foul charnel den, the abode of the bat, and owl, the slow-worm, and the lizard, pervaded with, and breeding pestilential air, was a place neither

fit for the living, or the occupation even of the dead. The chapel and the vaults underneath it were unfit even for the reception of a corpse.

And so, to overcome the emergency, and to procure, if even only a temporary decent and healthful resting place for the remains near his own ancestry and kin, of the last owner and master of the estate, Mr. Lumley had caused the *campo santo* between the chapel and the high iron palings to be cleared of its wild overgrowth of rank grass and uncomely weeds, and there into a common earth grave they had lowered the coffin of Bertram Gonault.

As soon however as the High Court of Chancery had placed in the hands of the respectable lawyer the power and discretion to manage the Vernwood property, the complete renovation of the mausoleum, with a view to giving a permanent and worthy resting place to Bertram's remains, was one of the first things which occupied Mr. Lumley's mind, and with that remarkable celerity with which money

can "make the mare go," a posse of workmen and mechanics quickly transformed and metamorphosed the whole aspect of the place.

* * * * *

This process of renovation was now complete.

The chapel, externally and internally, and the vaulted chamber beneath, had been cleared and cleansed; the bats and the owls and the toads had been driven forth; beautified, nay almost rebuilt, and in the vaulted chamber a new and costly sarcophagus awaited the transposal and reception of the late Bertram's remains.

Before however the temporary grave could be legally reopened or the coffin with its occupant exhumed and removed, an order or *permit* from the English Secretary of State was required by law.

This *permit* Mr. Lumley had already procured, and now all was only waiting his written order to proceed.

* * * * *

This rather lengthy explanation has been necessary to show what Mr. Lumley meant, when amid a setting of somewhat strong language, he vowed he would convince "Mister Vander Meulen" how absurdly he was in the wrong.

If they could show the unbelieving Yankee the coffin and the grave, he thought that would be quite enough to convince him that Bertram Gonault was in his coffin and not alive either in London or New York.

Thus far had matters gone—the *permit* of the Secretary of State had been procured, and now only the actual work or ceremony of removal of the coffin and body remained.

Then, Mr. Lumley not thinking that his own presence was absolutely necessary at the disinterment and removal of the remains, had sent orders to Mr. Price the managing agent on the estate to have in readiness a gang of workmen and be prepared for the removal of the coffin containing the body of Bertram Gonault on a particular date.

On the previous evening he dispatched Doctor Sirius Wells with Colonel Vander Meulen, to arrive at Vernwood and be present when the actual removal of the body took place.

The two private detectives accordingly left London, passed the night in the hotel of a country town within easy distance of the Vernwood Estate, and next morning continued their journey and met Mr. Price who was accompanied by his men, and all proceeded up the hilly road to where the now cleansed and renovated and beautified building of the mausoleum stood in the midst of the grove of tall beech trees.

The summer had not on the whole been one of intensely blazing heat, and the earliest winds of approaching autumn had spread upon the ground a sparsely variegated carpet bed of brown and yellow leaves,—they had littered the consecrated ground, and falling thickly over the spot where so few short months before in a

few feet of earth they had laid all that remained of Bertram Gonault.

Arrived within the paled enclosure the workmen proceeded to the spot. They lifted, and laid aside the green squares of velvet turf which so fresh and green, and alas so soon grows over what is left of us all, they dug down and down into the loose and pulverous mould where they thought their late master had been laid. And there they found—What ? They found a tenantless grave.

CHAPTER XII.

BLANK.

We have shown in some of the foregoing chapters which recount the progress of events chronicled in this story, that the return of the heir of the ruined home at Vernwood to claim his own, his subsequent success in the accomplishment of his suit, and then his enterprise and the discovery and development of the unbounded, and till then unknown or untapped wealth of the old estate, were all a matter of remark, not to say astonishment, far and near throughout the country side.

We have shown that the occurrence of the murder of Bertram Gonault in all its ghastly surroundings, enveloped in all its profound and apparently impenetrable cloud of mystery, had

in an exaggerated and startling degree the effect of arousing in a whole section of the surrounding country the highest pitch of consternation, not to say alarm.

Had the merest beggar in tatters, a mere degraded atom of the scum of humanity, besotted, downbroken, whom nobody knew, and for whom, except to say that it was as well he was dead, nobody cared, or had the merest debased unholy drab in all her iniquities, had such an one as either of these been found dead by the wayside, assassinated by the murderer's ruthless hand, even then the curiosity and interest—perhaps even here and there the sympathy—of the community would have been aroused. The unclean body would have been accorded at least a Christian burial, if indeed but a pauper's grave, and all the machinery of the law would have been set in motion to avenge the cutting off of even so worthless a life.

But here the case was aggravated, intensified

a million-fold. A young man Bertram Gonault had appeared in England with proof sufficient to satisfy even the scrutinizing, microscopic exacting eye of the English law, that he was the legal rightful and lineal descendant of an old and honoured race, and the real and true heir to a stately ancestral home, far extending acres, and a large estate.

Not only had he satisfied the law and substantiated his claim, but he had compelled ranges of apparently barren hills, and apparently unprofitable woods, and apparently unproductive acres, from their very depths, to produce him for his wants, his necessities, his delectation, for even the wild squandering extravagances of his life, almost boundless wealth.

And he had yet further still, which ever exalts a man in the estimation of his neighbours and fellows, he had used, distributed, scattered, or squandered — sometimes unwisely, sometimes well, but ever lavishly and unstint-

ingly—the wealth that came to him for the idle pleasures or the solid benefit of other men.

And such a man as this, in all his greatnesses, in all his littlenesses, had been mysteriously butchered in cold blood, butchered with a deftness, with a clean cool audacity of purpose, and his life cut off with a suddenness and in a profound mysteriousness of surroundings which was appalling even to contemplation and to thought.

We have shown that the release of the supposed or imagined assassin of Bertram Gonault —the sole person apparently near when the horrid crime was done—had again raised anew the storm of consternation in the popular mind, which seemed while the suspected remained in custody, and justice either justly or unjustly, on the innocent or on the guilty, was likely to claim her own, and the crime avenged, which for the time at least was lulled, had had again the effect of providing for thousands of brains and

thousands of tongues unlimited food for talk, conjecture and thought.

In the pages that have been written this has been all attempted to be set forth and shown.

And then the Vernwood tragedy was sinking into the list of undiscovered, and unrequited, unpunishable, if not unforgotten, crimes.

But if all the intensest sentiments of wonder, consternation, and alarm had been excited by these events, the disappearance of Bertram Gonault's body from the grave—if ever indeed in the grave it had been really laid—all past astonishments were as nothing compared to this last and new surprise.

And then on to this there floated on the Vernwood air, there went from tongue to tongue the strange, vague, mysterious still more terrifying rumour, that Bertram Gonault was not dead, that all that solemn sad-faced train of mourners, who to take a last look had passed the bier, that those who had followed the coffined body on its last journey past the Dower House,

and up the hilly road to the Mausoleum—that all these, in some mysterious way, had been *duped*, and that Bertram Gonault more than once, more than twice, again and again had been seen alive and identified both in London and New York by a detective who had been employed to dog out the track of crime.

Was the owner of Vernwood a magician? they asked—after all, if he were a magician or not, he had performed tricks as wonderful and freaks as wild as that.

* * * * *

As the summer waned and faded with a gloom which seemed as if the meteorological conditions were in sympathy with Bertram Gonault's fate, and autumn seemed to be omitted from the declining year, for days and days search parties scoured the estate.

But it seemed the complete, entire, disappearance of the coffin and body from the grave—if there it had ever been—which many doubted—was as profound a mystery as was

Bertram Gonault's death, and as strange and mysterious as much, very much, that happened in his life.

Having exposed this new development of the Vernwood mystery we will return again to another and previously noticed aspect of the case.

* * * * *

After this blank failure of Mr. Lumley's vow that he would show "Mister" Vander Meulen how absurdly he was in the wrong, and the blank refusal of even the earth to give up her supposed dead, after waiting one or two days at Vernwood the two detectives returned to town.

Colonel Vander Meulen although he put on a serious face, when once more he found himself alone, chuckled vigorously in his sleeve, inwardly sure that in due time he would succeed in showing a different exposure and solution of the fraud, for a fraud it almost seemed to be in the New York detective's keen eyes.

And yet in those days which he had spent at Vernwood, questioning those who were intimately acquainted with the facts of the case, the mystery seemed to him as profound, it appeared to him even more profound, even as a tank or well, by reflection, appears more profound the longer and more steadfastly we gaze into its to us unfathomable depths.

The two men returned to London to their respective quarters, Doctor Sirius Wells, a not too active factor in the case, to his office near Whitehall, while the plain Colonel Vander Meulen, once more, by that perfect process of metamorphose in which he seemed to be a born adept, took himself again to Mrs. Chicketts' first floor front drawing room, completely again transmogrified into the impressive personality of "Captain West."

But here for Colonel Vander Meulen a disappointment was in store, for on attempting to resume his system of espionage on the man whom he had got so far as to learn to know

by the stage name of Lawrence Haughton, it was with a consternation, a chagrin which overcame him, that during those days of absence from London spent at Vernwood, he came soon to learn that from his old haunts the said Lawrence Haughton had disappeared.

Day by day and night by night Colonel Vander Meulen or Captain West frequented both the vicinity of Leicester Square and the house off Maida Vale. But no more sign of this Lawrence Haughton was visible than if he had departed this life.

The Colonel's mortification at thus missing, perhaps losing sight for ever, of his man was intense.

We will however leave for a while Captain West in his puzzling dilemma in order to trace some other characters whose fates and fortunes have ere now become interwoven with the thread of our tale.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONLY A DOG.

But in the midst of all this dark obscurity, of all this strange mystery, in the depths of this conflict of words, wherein the great London conveyancing solicitor and every one else who thought they knew, and contemptuously pooh-poohed any contrary statement; when they asserted that the late heir to the Vernwood estate was foully and most mysteriously murdered, ruthlessly butchered and dead, while one of, and probably the ablest and acutest detective that either the American or the European continent could produce, just as strongly asserted—notwithstanding the *New York World's* highly flavoured report that he had been burnt to a cinder in Long Island City, and his remains